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IN CUPID'S WARS

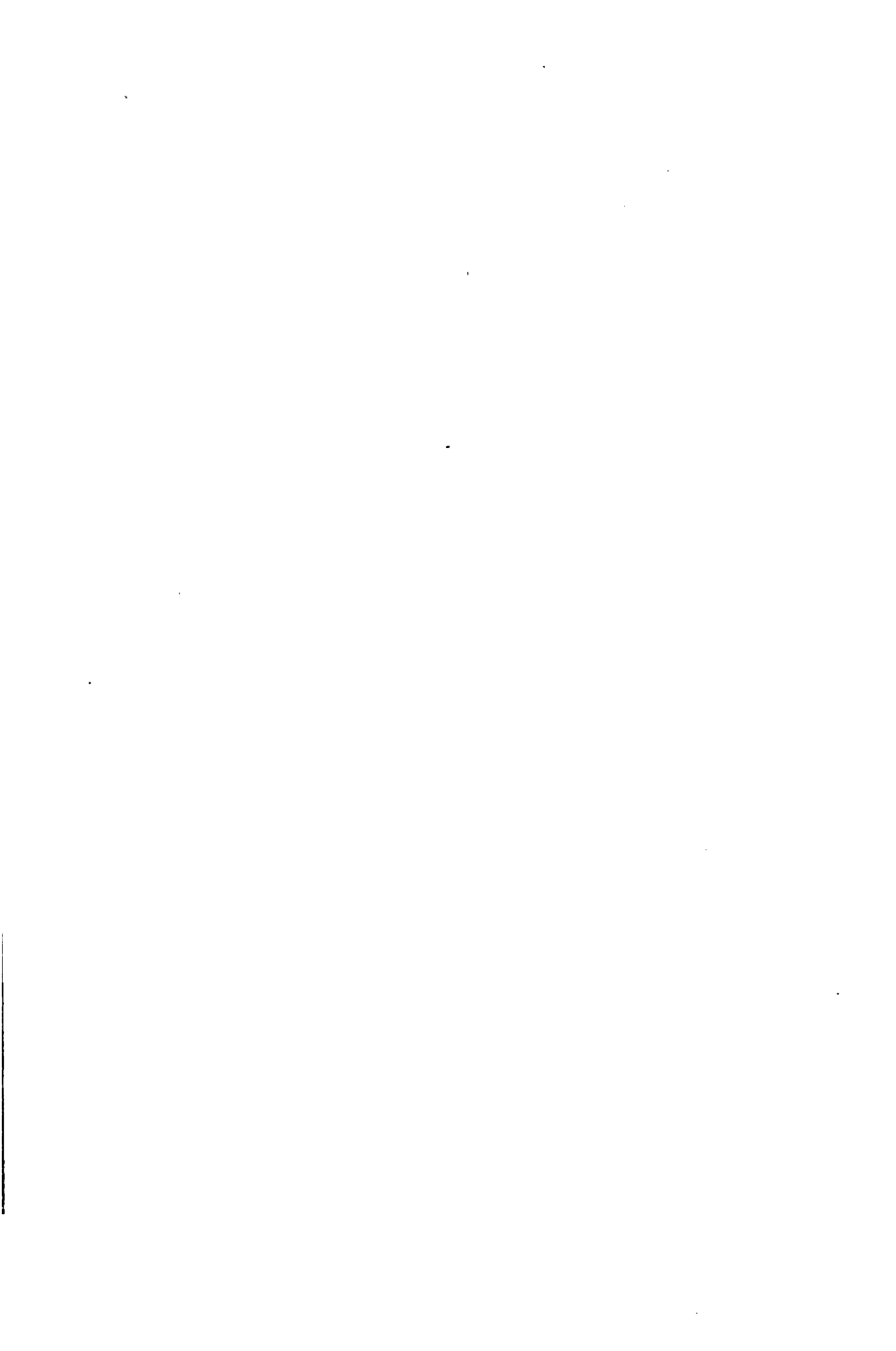
CHARLES GIBBON











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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
F. V. WHITE & Co., 31, SOUTHAMPTON ST., STRAND.
1884.

256 . e . 20 .

PRINTED BY
KELLY AND CO., GATE STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.;
AND MIDDLE MILL, KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.



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IN CUPID'S WARS.



CHAPTER I.

COUNTERPLOT.

I wish, I wish—I wish in vain,
I wish I had my heart again,
And vainly think I'd not complain,
Is go de tu mo murnin slàn. Shule Aroon.

THE struggle of a woman's heart with a woman's hate raged long and fiercely beneath the soft velvet folds which covered the bosom of Maude Morgan.

Outside, she could so far command herself as to hide somewhat of the passion which surged within her. But alone in her own chamber, she turned away all effort of restraint, and gave loose rein to the feeling of outrage which was gnawing so fiercely at her heart-strings

She forgot everything. The world—what was the world to her now? Her father quite forgotten in the whirlpool of her rage, she only remembered that she had been deceived, befooled, betrayed ; and for yonder peasant. Oh, that she might wither them, crush them all—all.

So argued the woman's hate.

But still there came a low, sweet pleading voice up from the depths of the woman's heart, reminding her of love. Then she would sink down upon a seat, and hiding her face, sob and sob, that she had lost the one affection which she had prized in life.

But out spoke hate again.

Should she bear calmly—quietly pause on her way as if she had not been thus cruelly deceived.

“No.”

She would take measures for retaliation.

To that end she had already matured a scheme ; but to carry it out she required the assistance of Conolly. She was certain

she might count upon that; and now she waited impatiently his coming, as she had bade him when the mutual recognition had taken place in the old keep of Ballybar.

On the previous evening Maude had, according to her appointment, met Anasthause at the ruins of O'Sullivan's farm. The old woman would give no explanation, but asked to be taken up behind Maude. After some hesitation this was agreed to; and then Anasthause directing the course they sped over hill and dale to Ballybar. Arrived at the foot of the hill, the two women dismounted. The horse was fastened to a tree in a thick copse, and Maude submitted to be blindfolded by her strange guide.

When the bandage was removed from her eyes she was in a damp cavernous place, which she found to be the vaults of the old tower.

They had left the tower in the same manner; the two women had again mounted the horse and were soon speeding

upon a home journey ; but Maude was weak, and Anasthause was obliged to proceed with her almost to Banbally House.

Here, however, Maude had recovered sufficient strength to find her way into the domain and then into the house by private doors, of which she possessed keys.

For the horse, she had purchased the silence and assistance of Dennys the groom, who waited patiently for the return of his mistress, speculating deeply upon the probable cause of her absence. When she returned, therefore, Dennys was ready to take the sorely run steed, clean it, feed it, and ask many questions of it, to which he received no answer.

Maude had crept up to her bedroom and locked herself in ; she cast off her hat and gloves and threw herself, with a low moan, upon the bed. There she had remained without changing her position in a sort of stupor. When consciousness returned to her it was broad daylight, but still she had not moved.

She lay thinking and trying to realize to herself all the miseries of her position, then had come sobs, and sighs, and deep heavings of the bosom, and at last tears—warm salt tears.

They brought her relief; she felt calmer, stronger after them. She rose from the bed and bathed her heated brow in cold water. Then she sat down by the windows and looked out upon the display of her father's and her wealth, which was to be seen in the pleasure-grounds of Banbally House.

Sitting there in the calm, still morning, her good or evil genius had worked upon her, and she had discovered the means whereby she might either satisfy herself by a deep full revenge or by a simple triumph of the power of her beauty.

And now she had decided upon what course to pursue. She would play one grand, bold stake for love. And if it failed? No matter. She was determined. She would not think of failure yet awhile. She

did not think it possible that she would fail.

Being resolved, she had recovered much of her self-possession; and outwardly she was now quite cool, quite collected. There was no flutter, no hurry in her movements; her tread as she walked about was stately and firm as ever.

Her face was a little paler than usual, but otherwise there was no apparent change.

* * * * *

Up and down—up and down before the large entrance gate of Banbally House—paced uneasily a tall, gaunt man—Phelim Conolly.

The porter looked out from between the bars of the gate and wondered what maggot possessed the man that he chose to walk sentry there. Or was he a robber watching for some opportunity to steal? And if he were an honest man what could he be thinking about? Strange things was Phelim Conolly thinking about—about the

past, about the present, and about the future.

He was debating within himself whether or not he should keep his appointment with Maude. He had been debating that question all night, and had not come to a conclusion yet.

"Will I go or not?" he kept muttering to himself. "Will I go or not? I feel there is danger of more pain to myself—more trial, more sorrow; for, St. Patrick help me, she has still power over me. Will I go or not?"

And he continued to pace up and down with his hands clasped behind his back, still undecided.

He stopped and raised his head.

"Perhaps she needs my help," he said, slowly.

Suddenly he clenched his teeth.

"Perhaps she does; and, by the frogs, I'll go and see."

He hurried up the avenue out of sight of the lodge, but his pace again slackened

and became hesitating. Then he started off with redoubled vigour, swinging his arms, setting his hat on the side of his head, and trying hard to give himself a reckless, devil-may-care look.

But the effort was vain. His arms would not swing; his hat would not stay on the side of his head; and by the time he reached the house his face was pale and quite serious.

As he was being conducted to the room wherein Maude was awaiting him he made one more effort. He would appear cool, nonchalant. To strengthen himself he began to hum the air of his favourite ditty, "St. Patrick the Saint of old Ireland"—but the sound died in a hollow, frightening manner down in his chest.

He entered the room, and Maude advanced to receive him.

He took her hand, and his trembled a little. Their eyes met—she smiled, and the sluices were drawn. The waters of the past rushed tumultuously back upon him

with all the old love—with all the fervent heart-burnings.

Maude observed his agitation, and considerably requested him to be seated.

He sat down; his head bent forward upon his chest.

She turned to the table, upon which stood a tray with various decanters and glasses.

“Wine or brandy, Mr. Conolly?” she asked, softly, without looking at him.

“Brandy.”

Maude almost dropped the glass, the voice was so hollow, so unearthly.

She handed him a large glass; he emptied and returned it.

“More.”

She gave him another glassful, and his eyes brightened and he raised his head.

“Ah—you see I’ve had a long walk this morning and feel tired,” he said apologetically, and with a faint approach to somewhat of his usual rollicking manner. “I was trying too with bad grace to do without my best friend, the spirit. And as a

natural consequence I found myself very much deficient in my natural element."

Maude seated herself opposite him.

"Now, I feel much better," he said, clearing his throat; "and by your leave, ma'am, we will proceed at once to the object of my visit."

He spoke as if he desired to make the visit as short as possible.

Maude had her head turned towards the window; she looked round.

"You seem hurried, Mr. Conolly."

"I've little time to spare."

"Ah! I perceive," she said, with a slight sigh; "my poor society has no charm in it now. But there was a time when such was not the case."

Conolly trembled visibly. He passed his hand through his hair, and stared vacantly before him.

"Do not—do not, I beseech you, recall the past."

The voice was hollow, and the lips quivered as the words came forth.

Maude eyed him pityingly. She remembered the agony of the past night, and felt something like sympathy with this unfortunate passion, which could never be requited.

"Phelim," she murmured, compassionately.

He started to his feet with a cry; staggered and clutched at the back of a chair for support.

Maude drew back in alarm.

His face had become deadly pale, and his features worked convulsively. He was quivering from head to foot. He held up his hands and half turned away his head. His lips moved as if he would speak, but could not find voice.

"I must go," he murmured, at length.

But he made no motion to fulfil the intent expressed in his words.

Maude spoke eagerly.

"No, no, you must not go. You must learn for what I have desired you to come here."

"I must go," he repeated.

And this time he made a step towards the door, but he staggered and was obliged to cling to the chair.

Maude touched him gently upon the shoulder. He quivered again.

She looked imploringly in his face.

"You will not leave me, Phelim," she said, softly. "You will not leave me when I have told you that I need your aid—your help? That I, Maude—Maude, whom of old you loved, am in trouble, and call upon Phelim Conolly to prove the devotion which years ago he swore."

Conolly did not look at her. He turned his eyes away vacantly.

"Let the dead be dead," he murmured, hoarsely. "The man who stands before you is not the Phelim Conolly who years ago loved you. Let the dead be dead."

"Don't say that," she returned. There was a silvery sweetness in her tones which sank deep into the hearer's bosom. "Don't say that. There may—there have been

many changes since then, but your heart, Phelim, your heart is still unaltered."

He did not reply immediately. He was recovering from the effects of the first gush of memory. He stretched forth his hand, and put her gently from him.

"Maude Morgan," he said, in a voice that gathered firmness as he went on; "years ago, when little more than a wild, reckless boy, I saw you. My soul rushed out towards you, and I loved you. The air you breathed, the ground on which you trod, the sky which looked down upon you—all, all were dear to me for your sake. I might have been something then. I was young, brave, undebauched, wealthy; and the world was before me. For your sake I would have done something great; for the whole heart of which you have spoken was freely, truly given to you."

He paused as if to gain breath. Maude sat down, hiding her face in her hands. He continued—

"And what was your return? You led

me by a silken cord, that had wound itself round my inmost being and would not be unwound. You led me on, dallied, played with me, and in the deep waters you snapped the cord, and left me, helpless, to flounder to the shore as best I might. I was without hope, without ambition. What wonder that I sank? I gambled, rioted, drank deep of the burning liquid, which had been my best and worst friend. Daily I sank lower; daily burrowed deeper in the mire. At length I was ruined in pocket, almost in health. I was turned adrift, to live—no matter how. Life was a burden, the world a blank to me. I was an utter ruin.”

He paused again, passing his hand abstractedly through his hair.

“Say no more,” murmured Maud, “you would not if you knew how much you pain me.”

Conolly smiled bitterly.

“I have done,” he said. “You see me now no better than I was, save that I have

scraped up a desperate interest in life, though ready at any moment to die, gladly. I am a rebel—an outlaw—regarded by the world as a common felon; and I have a fiend's pleasure in standing up against the world—in hating it—in waging with it daily war, with the fine excitement of death at every step. It is gambling on a large scale—a great game, in which the stake is life."

Maude could not trust herself to speak.

Conolly resumed, in a vague, dreamy manner, as if his thoughts were far away.

"I know all this might have been different. There was something good in me at first; but Maude, the fair, false Maude, is to blame for all."

"Phelim," she exclaimed, starting.

He turned his head quickly towards her.

She stood with her eyes raised meekly to his; her hands crossed upon her bosom.

He was fascinated, and gazed in silence.

Maude spoke slowly—now and again passionately.

“It is now my turn,” she said; “and you must hear me. You loved me—I believe it. You say that I was false; at least there is extenuation for my fault. When you came with soft words to my ears I was a mere child—a school-girl, with little thought of the greatness of love. Your words, your protestations, were pleasing. I never dreamt of aught serious in either. A weak, foolish girl, who, half-an-hour after you had been dismissed, wept that you were gone.”

“She could have called me back, yet did not.”

“You are wrong——”

“How?”

“I sent after you, but you had fled, without saying whither you were going.”

“True—true,” and Conolly pressed his brow with his hands.

“Days, weeks, months passed, and nothing was heard of you. I was at first

fretful, then angry with you. Still you came not. Other incidents of my life interfered, and withdrew my girlish thoughts from you. At length I heard of your ruin; your name mentioned with contempt, as that of a man without principle, and I was told that duty required me to forget you."

Conolly groaned.

She touched him gently on the arm.

"But it was not so," she said. "I still remembered you in secret, though I sometimes shuddered at the excesses to which you were driven."

"I was mad—quite mad," said Conolly, with a bitter laugh. "Oh, holy saints, had I but known that you sometimes thought of me, I might have been saved. Why did you not send me one word of consolation?"

"I did."

"When—how?"

"On several occasions. Once my messenger found you at home; and, without

hearing his message, you turned him from your house."

Again that bitter laugh.

"Ay, ay, I was mad—quite mad."

"The next information we received was, that you were gone away altogether, and that your patrimony was sold to Mr.—to the present proprietor."

"Curse him," muttered Conolly, fiercely.

Maude looked at him in surprise.

She resumed, in a quiet tone.

"But, through all your trials, sorrows, my sympathy, my pity has ever been with you."

"For that, thanks."

Maude turned away her head with a deep-drawn sigh.

"Heaven knows," she murmured, "I now feel, myself, how hard it is to lose the one being whom we love."

"What mean you?"

There was a pause.

Maude appeared to be trying to suppress some strong emotion.

Conolly eyed her wonderingly.

At length she turned to him. There were upon her cheeks two bright hectic spots.

"I will confide in you," she said.

"You may."

"And you will aid me?"

The answer was not immediate—

"With my life."

The sound came deep and slow, as if the words rose up from the depths of his being.

Maude was satisfied.

"Then, listen," she said. "A man, with all that knowledge of a woman's nature, which in an honest man brings happiness, and in a dishonest one, misery, found his way here, some time ago. I cannot tell you how it came about, but—but——"

She stopped, confusedly.

Conolly was now very calm.

"Well?" he asked.

She continued, very hurriedly.

"Well, he professed love for me, and I bestowed upon him the whole trust of my

nature. I have found that I am deceived."

"Deceived."

"Ay, fooled—betrayed."

"Who is the man?"

Conolly's face was fierce with passion. He gripped the back of the chair as if he could break it.

"Nay, there must be no violence."

"Who is the man?"

"I cannot tell you until you promise to obey me, and to aid me only as I shall direct."

"What. Shall I not kill him?"

"Would you have killed me for not loving you?"

"No. But——"

"There's no difference. Promise to obey me in this matter."

"I will."

"Then the man is—Mr. Brogden."

"Ben Brogden. Fiends take him he has been the curse of my life."

"You understand all now?"

"Yes, yes. But what is it you mean to do? You will strike blow for blow?"

"I shall, but in my own way. First, I shall try to win him back by being always near to him, always aiding, always watching him—by making myself necessary to his life."

"And to accomplish this?"

"I will join your band."

"Join our band? Impossible. You are a woman."

Maude smiled. She walked to the other side of the room and returned with a small bundle. She opened it and disclosed a rough suit of male clothes.

Conolly stared in amaze, alternately at the clothes and at Maude.

"Do you understand?" she enquired.

"No. You do not mean that——"

"That I will don these clothes and disguise myself as a boy. I do. In that character you can introduce me to your friends. I shall then be near him, and prove to myself the utter baseness of his nature, or win him back despite himself."

"But should you be recognised?"

"He would not harm me."

"Do not depend too much upon his charity."

"Then you will be at hand to protect me from his and all other violence."

"But in the event of discovery the men might turn upon me."

Maude gazed fixedly into his eyes.

"And for my sake will not Phelim Conolly run that risk?"

A pause.

Suddenly Conolly started as from a reverie.

"Will nothing dissuade you from this wild scheme?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"Then I will do all that you desire. It was alone for your sake that I hesitated."

"This is like yourself. Would that I could repay you as you desire."

"And when," said Conolly, abruptly, "do you propose putting this strange plan into execution?"

"At once," exclaimed Maude.

"Impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Because——"

"Go on."

"Because Ballybar Keep is now a scene into which no stranger may intrude without danger of detection and death."

"I have no fear, and I am determined."

"By Jove, Maude Morgan, you are a spirited creature."

"Have you forgiven me?"

"I have forgiven, Maude, but I have not forgotten. How can I forget? Enough; you shall not be balked."

"Thanks—thanks."

"Don't thank me," Conolly said, in a low, deep voice; "but at ten to-night meet me at the cross road. You must come in your male attire and on foot."

"I will be there."

"I will have horses ready, and before midnight you shall be face to face with the Captain."

"Look!—Look!" cried Maude, moving to the window.

Conolly looked out upon the lawn.

"Perdition," he muttered. "Talk of the devil."

Brogden was riding swiftly up the avenue, towards Banbally House. He was gaily dressed, and his face was flushed with exercise.

"You must be off at once," said Maude, drawing Conolly back into the shadow.

"But how? If I pass down the staircase I shall meet him face to face. Hark."

The sound of horse's hoofs ceased below, and there was a loud knock at the hall-door.

"Here is a door which leads to the back of the house. Begone."

Conolly hesitated.

A servant entered, announcing Mr. Benjamin Brogden.

"Show him up," said Maude, and the domestic retired.

Conolly opened the inner door.

"To-night," he said, pausing on the threshold.

"Yes, yes, I will be there."

Footsteps on the staircase.

"Farewell," said Conolly as he disappeared.

The door was closed behind him. Maude moved swiftly to the window, and looked forth.

Brogden entered. She turned with a cold smile. They shook hands.

"You are quite a stranger, sir," said Maude, motioning her visitor to a chair.

"I have been busy."

"That is no excuse for neglect."

"It is the only excuse I have to offer," observed Brogden, curtly. "How is Mr. Morgan?"

"Ill and confined to his room."

There was an uneasy pause. Maude was the first to speak. Her tone was low, questioning, and sarcastic.

"You have as yet received no clue to

the hiding-place of the murderer of the O'Sullivans?"

"No," was the answer, as he looked up darkly.

"Nor to the fate of the unfortunate girl, Ailleen?"

"No—no. What clue should I have?"

"My question was a very simple one, and need not have put you out of temper."

He rose up with an impulsive cry.

"Maude Morgan, what is the meaning of this coldness?"

"Sir!"

"Why do you receive me with such distance? I will have an answer."

"You mistake me; I am neither cold nor distant."

"Do not prevaricate."

"Have you come hither to make me the scapegoat of a fit of spleen?" asked Maude, icily.

"You are cruel, unkind, unfeeling."

Maude laughed.

A clear, ringing laugh, like the swift uncoiling of a snake.

"Enough, Maude Morgan ; I will intrude no longer. I am too proud a man willingly to afford you matter for amusement."

And he walked to the door.

"Stay."

He paused, biting his lips.

"I will forgive you," Maude said, holding out her hand with a smile, "if, like a true knight, you will render me a full account of your doings during the past week."

For a moment Brogden looked suspicious ; but the bright eyes reassured him. He was about to take the outstretched hand when she drew it back.

"First, your explanation, fire eater. Sit down."

He laughed uneasily, and re-seated himself.

"I have been ill," he said.

"Ill? What has been your complaint?" she asked, sarcastically ; "heart disease?"

"Bah. You would provoke a saint."

"St. Benjamin?"

"I have been ill—so ill that I have been confined to my chamber. I have been busy too—very busy. The affairs of my estate are involved. Perhaps that fact will afford you some amusement."

"Proceed."

"I have told you all."

"Well, there is my hand. I called one day at Abbey Hall."

"So Shamus informed me," he said, looking at his watch. "I have an appointment down in Clarah and must go. I merely called on my way, thinking the few minutes I had to spare might be sweetened by a kindly welcome, but you have disappointed me."

"What did you expect?"

"At least a friendly greeting."

"Have I been unkind?"

"I will leave your own heart to answer that question."

"If I have pained you I am sorry. We

women are fidgetty creatures, and very apt to get out of temper with you cavaliers. There. You see I apologise."

He smiled as if relieved.

"Farewell, Maude."

And he kissed her hand. At the kiss she shuddered, and he looked at her strangely.

"Why do you tremble?" he asked.

"I am cold."

"As ice," he muttered to himself, as he quitted the apartment.

Maude Morgan watched her lover as he mounted his horse and rode down the avenue; and when he disappeared she turned aside with a tear on her cheek.

"Perjured! false!" she murmured.

Then her lips were set close together—a cold, firm light appeared in her eyes—and she hurried to her chamber to make preparation for the adventures of the coming night.

CHAPTER II.

THE PATRIOTS, MEETING AT KITTY MULLINS'S.

I bear no hate against living thing,
But I love my country above my king.

The Croppy Boy.

STILL failure. Maurice held up his head bravely. But it was the bravery of doggedness and pride. He would not confess that he was beaten. Yet his heart was sinking very low.

There was another day gone; and now at night-fall he was within a mile of Lough Bragh, in the precincts of which so much of his time had been spent and where his hopes had been raised so high. Here again, and not even one step in advance.

And now a new doubt for a moment troubled him more than all his fruitless searchings.

What demon whispered it to his heart in the darkness?

He wondered was it possible that Aileen could have been away so long and not have found some means of communicating with her friends, if she had the will? Merciful powers! There was the cruel doubt. Could she, of her own inclination, have remained with——

Away. The thought was vile, foul, calumnious to the purest woman that ever walked the earth. Maurice shook the doubt from him as he would have done with a filthy garment.

So the night fell, and Maurice and his companions rested upon a green knoll.

Maurice threw himself upon his back, and, with his arms under his head, watched the stars as they one by one began to light up the great firmament of heaven.

Old Pudge was quite exhausted.

"Faith," he said in confidence, "if it's after going on this way much longer we

are I'm thinking that it's burying old Paudge Reilly ye'll be without ever the benefit of salt or clergy."

Michael was dull and stupid. Tony was sorely troubled with fears for Maurice, and not a little on his own account. For the picture of pretty Bridget quietly making butter at home, and perhaps sighing for him, was constantly present to his mind's eye. But they all rested in silence now, not speaking their inward discontent.

Nothing had been heard of Phadhrick; and in passing through Rathlin, Maurice had ascertained that Captain Houghton, acting upon some private information, had with his troops gone farther up the country.

But Maurice was not thinking of them; his memory had suddenly recalled the fact that he had promised this night to take the Rathboys' oath and be formally admitted a member of that band of rebels.

He shuddered at the thought of this

sacrifice and of the unforeseen results which it might incur.

Just at this moment he heard the sound of a horse's hoof tread approaching. His companions had also heard the sound and stood up ready with their guns for any emergency. They walked out into the road ; it was as well to see who the traveller was.

They discovered by the dim light of the stars the figure of a single horseman slowly approaching them.

"Stand. Who are you that travel this way so late?"

"Why ,my good lieutenant," said the horseman with a laugh, "you will do excellently for the command of an outpost. Who am I?—why,who else but your friend, Ben Brogden ; and my principal business this way was to look for you. There is a full answer, and now do you go along with me?"

"Don't—don't, Maurice, darling !" whispered Tony, earnestly—"don't do it, for

the love of the old father that's at home, and that'll break his poor heart to learn that it's after making a dirty Rathboy of yourself ye've been—don't."

At length he answered Tony in an undertone.

"He must never know of it, Tony ; and it is for—for Ailleen's sake."

Tony hung his head as he heard the response.

"Lead on."

Brogden touched his horse lightly with his heel, and the animal walked slowly forward. Maurice and the others followed.

Presently Brogden stopped. He bent over to Maurice, who was near him, and spoke in a low tone.

"Look here, Maurice," he said, "take my advice ; you had best get rid of your men."

"For what reason ?"

"This : for the present ; we have got a sufficient number of men of their class—therefore, they can't join us. It is men of education, like you, that are wanted now.

They cannot be admitted to the ceremonies ; and were they to linger about the place, who knows what evil might befall seeing that the military are so much upon the alert. Do you see ? ”

“ Yes ; I will dispose of them. ”

With a strange foreboding in his breast, Maurice turned to those men who, up till that moment, had shared all his perils and adventures. They paused before him.

“ Tony, Paudge, Michael, ” said Maurice, in a softened voice, “ you must leave me now. You, Paudge, are unfit to continue this rough work ; and you, Michael, are wearied out. You must all go home. I must be left alone. ”

Tony gave a howl. Paudge rubbed his eyes in amaze. Michael opened his mouth and stared boobyishly.

“ Now, good-bye, ” continued Maurice.

“ It’s for killing ye they are ! ” roared Tony, drawing his sleeve across his eyes ; “ that’s what it is they’re after, and bad, bad luck to me if I go from you. ”

"Tony, you cannot go with me. It is necessary that I should go alone. You must leave me."

"Sorra the foot, I tell ye."

"Tush, man!—you must."

"Ochone! but this is the sad day for me, and for the poor old man at home, thinking of ye, and longing every minute of his life to see ye again."

"Enough—enough. Go back to the farm. Tell my father that I am in health and you can come out to me again."

Tony, seeing that Maurice was determined, became somewhat reconciled to the separation when he heard that he was to rejoin his foster-brother.

"And where am I to find ye?" he asked.

"If you do not meet me among the hills you will hear of me at Rathlin. Good-bye."

"Good-bye; and may all the saints of heaven watch over ye."

And the three rough men turned their faces homeward.

Once more the horse moved forward, with Maurice walking silently by its side.

On reaching Lough Bragh, they proceeded along the north side towards the supposed fairy region. At length Brogden pulled up his horse, and Maurice also stopped.

They were close to the water. But stretching away out into the Lough was an immense crop of long reeds.

"Wait there a minute," said Brogden.

The horse galloped up to the wood ; and in a short time Brogden returned on foot. He put his fingers to his mouth, and gave a long, peculiar whistle.

For a few moments all was silent. Then, in the distance, was heard the splash of something in the water. A few moments more, and the two men on the beach saw, at the outskirts of the reeds, a man in a boat.

He paused and whistled. Brogden answered ; and immediately the boat was propelled, with marvellous skill, through

the very centre of the reeds to the shore,

“Now then,” said Brogden. He jumped in, and Maurice followed.

The boat was shoved off; away through the reeds again, and out into the clear water.

There was no moon, but the stars shone down upon them with a subdued light. The opposite shores were like two black hills. Gradually the outline of the side which they were approaching became more developed, and at last the boat shot into a rocky cove.

The man secured the boat beside two others which were there.

Brogden and Maurice leaped on to the slippery rock, and proceeded across a patch of bare land, to a small mud hut, which stood at the foot of a black-looking hill. From the chinks in the window-shutter and door, long rays of light streamed out across their path.

Brogden approached the door as if

familiar with the place. He raised the latch, and entered, followed by Maurice and the man who had ferried them over the Lough.

The apartment was small and poorly furnished. But the great fire of wood and peat, which blazed upon the hearth, gave the place a comfortable appearance. The large chimney-top overhung the heads of three men, who sat round the fire smoking.

A number of stools were scattered about; a large wooden box stood in one corner; a bed with a patch covering in another. Upon a rude deal sideboard stood a quantity of earthenware, amongst which was a number of small mugs. From a door, standing close by the sideboard, issued sundry grunts, and other manifestations of the presence of pigs. This was Kitty Mullins's.

Kitty's place had long been under the suspicion of the county gauger. But he could never catch her; and her two sons were such formidable-looking fellows that

he thought it best to be quiet. His good sense was rewarded by the quarterly receipt of a small keg of prime spirits. And those who knew the ways of the place could always procure a stiff noggin of potheen at less than half the ordinary price.

Kitty herself was a woman of immense size, broadways, but decidedly short in stature. She rolled about, with her fat, puffy cheeks and red arms, like an overfed pig on its hind legs; withal, she was good-tempered, and took and gave a joke with her customers in the best of humour.

As the new visitors entered, she was bustling among the mugs on the sideboard, busy filling them with something.

"Hullo, Kitty," said Brogden, jocularly, as he entered; "and how does the wind blow with you, my duck?"

"It's hot and cold it blows, as it always does, my drake," was the ready response.

"You look blooming"

"Thank ye for small favours, Squire; and I'm sorry I can't return the com-

pliment, for it's as white as the ghost in the snow ye look."

"Then I'll have to take an extra dose of your physic, and gain new blood."

"Bedad it's the truth that ye're speaking."

"Well, is there any one here?"

"Oh, a mighty lot, but I don't know how many."

"Humph!—then we'll go round at once."

Kitty called to the man of the boat, who was a big, soft-looking fellow.

"Here, Murphy, go round and help the Squire," said Kitty; and she instantly resumed her momentarily suspended operation of filling the mugs.

Murphy led the way round to the back of the hut, where they entered a low-roofed wooden shed. It was quite dark. Brogden and Murphy stooped down. Maurice stood aside, silently wondering at all these singular proceedings.

The two men breathed hard, as if they

were trying to lift some heavy weight. Suddenly they rose up, and there was a heavy sound, as if a large stone had been turned over.

Maurice started back. There, at his feet, opened what at first sight appeared like a fiery pit.

"Come," said Brogden.

He stepped on to a ladder which stood in a pit. He looked up. Maurice was staring at him, without showing any symptoms of moving.

Brogden laughed.

"Come along, man; you are perfectly safe. This is simply the entrance to a private apartment, which we keep on this side of the country for extra occasions, such as to night."

"I was somewhat amazed at first," said Maurice. "It's all right now; go on."

"Murphy, you'll sec to the cover?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"Come along, then, Maurice, my boy; you are near the end of trouble."

Brogden descended the ladder as he spoke. Maurice, not without some little trepidation, followed. As he slowly moved downwards, he heard the dull, heavy thud of the stone falling upon the entrance above.

The descent of the ladder was about eighteen feet; and having reached the bottom, Maurice found himself in a long square earthen apartment. At the end nearest to him an immense fire was blazing brightly upon the ground. The roof was about eight feet high, and was supported by a number of stout poles placed at intervals from one end of the apartment to the other. In the roof were numerous holes, through which the smoke escaped, and air was admitted. Notwithstanding this, the place was close and warm.

Outside, upon the mountain, the rays of light streamed up from the holes in the roof with a weird effect; for they were surrounded by heath and brambles.

The end of the apartment opposite to

that at which the fire was placed was entirely in the shade. But a low, dark doorway showed that there were other subterranean mysteries beyond. And, indeed, the doorway led to Kitty Mullins's still-room.

In the centre of the apartment, and stretching almost to the full length of the place, was a broad deal board, raised upon supports of wood and stone. And down the sides of this table were two long forms, made of sods.

Upon these forms, and by the fire, sat a number of rough-looking men. For the most part, the men were dressed in coarse round-tailed coats, of a grey or blue colour. Some of them had red or blue handkerchiefs; the necks of others were quite bare.

About the features of all there was a darkly suspicious expression, as if they were in constant terror of being assaulted by some one. They were engaged in drinking out of small mugs, like those which

we have seen Kitty Mullins filling. They were smoking and talking. There had been some uproarous merriment among them, but upon the entrance of Brogden all signs of it disappeared.

Brogden scanned them rapidly.

"Well, boys," he said, "have you been enjoying yourselves?"

"Bedad, they couldn't help that with my pipes within half a mile of them," ejaculated Piper Rooney, who, with his hat crushed down on the back of his head, his pipes under his arm, and a mug of potheen in his hand, sat on the top of a large pile of peat.

"Faith," slyly retorted Maguire, who was seated close to the piper—"faith, Rooney, boy, your pipes would make the sweetest music in the world if all the holes were stopped, and the wind taken out of the bag."

There was a laugh.

"Get out, ye blackguard," cried Rooney, good-humouredly; "is it after taking away

the character of the oldest pipes in Clarah ye'd be?"

"That's it, Rooney, boy; they've been too long in this world, and they're getting sore in the throat."

Another laugh.

"It's the ear of ye that doesn't know music from a pig's grunt. Just listen again."

And Rooney, in support of his pipes, whined forth the most dismal strain that ever grated upon human ear. Then he broke into a quick, measured lilt, and the men began to hum and beat time upon the table with their mugs, and upon the ground with their feet. At these signs of approval, Rooney shouted triumphantly.

"D'ye hear that, now? Hurroo! D'ye hear that?"

To these proceedings Maurice stood a wondering spectator. Amongst all the hilarity there was a ghastly, sickening air, which impressed him with a doubt of the sincerity of the joy. He thought the con-

tents of the mugs formed a great part of it.

When the piper had begun to play, Brogden motioned to Maguire, who stepped aside with him.

"Where are the rest of the men?" inquired Brogden, in an undertone.

"I don't know. They'll all be here soon now."

"Humph! Conolly—where is he?"

"He's been away all day, and I don't know where."

"I should have thought he would not be the last to keep an assignation at Kitty Mullins's."

"Oh, never fear," said Maguire, laughing. "If he's behind time now, he'll make up for it when he does come."

"Well, I suppose we must wait a bit. Keep the spirits of the boys up as well as you can."

"That's Rooney's work. But the potheen's the best of all for that."

"Then give them plenty of it. There's

no danger just now. The soldiers have gone up by Ballybar."

"It's mighty little they'll find there."

Brogden turned to Maurice and handed him one of the small mugs, which he took abstractedly. He seated himself upon a stool, which Maguire placed for him, opposite the fire.

Brogden also sat down, and taking out a large-headed pipe, began quietly to smoke.

Presently he looked up.

"I say, Maguire, where's the Captain?"

"Oh, bedad! I forgot to tell ye. He's gone about some business, and won't be here to-night."

"Humph! that's awkward."

"But I was to tell ye that ye were to take his place, and in every way act for him."

"Ah! that settles the difficulty. This arrangement will be all the better for you, O'More."

And now dark, sun-tanned men began to arrive in parties of two and three, and the

long sod forms were fast filling. Soon the earthen apartment at Kitty Mullins's was almost crowded to excess with men of all statures, all figures, and all manner of vestures. There was, however, a family affinity. They were all sun-tanned in face, rough in hand, and coarsely clad.

The conversation was loud, and the drink flowed freely. Sometimes there was a song, which was always a wailing lament for the lost glories of poor old Ireland, and generally ended with a rebellious howl against the designing Government. For instance—

O, it's down by the sweet River Shannon,
The Shamrock is fading away,
But the rose shall be plucked from its stronghold,
And cast in the dirt to decay.

O, it's curst be the tyrants of Erin;
And rot may their bones on the tree;
And it's curst be the man that would false be,
Till the land of the Shamrock is free.

The singing of this song was vociferously applauded, and Piper Rooney, who was the singer, grew into high favour with the patriots.

Shortly after this song, Brogden, who had till then sat with his face to the fire, smoking, turned round to the table. He was at the head, and looked down upon several rows of dark faces. Seated at the bottom of the table was a little man in an old hat, which came much over his eyes, and a very loose grey over-coat. This personage never spoke, and when or how he had taken his seat no one had observed.

“Now, then, boys,” shouted Maguire, as Brogden faced about—“be aisy, will ye? The Squire’s going to speak.”

“Three cheers for the Squire!” shouted one enthusiast.

“Hooroo! hooroo! hooroo!” And the clatter and uproar was tremendous.

In the midst of this din, Phelim Conolly and Maude Morgan, *alias* Dennis Delaney—the name she had chosen to bear in her disguise as a boy—entered and took seats, unobserved by Brogden.

Silence was obtained at length, and the men turned their brown faces upon their

leader; waiting anxiously to hear what he had to say.

"Boys of the green raths," Brogden began, "I see expressed upon each face before me that our hearts are as one, and that our hearts beat indignant at the wrongs of poor bleeding Erin."

A general howl, in approval of Brogden, and in indignation at the country's wrongs.

Brogden went on. "We are resolved to win back old Ireland's freedom, or to die as our fathers died, battling for the dear honour of their country. We are resolved—a free land or death."

"Ay, ay, that's the truth."

"Too long have we lain groaning beneath the yoke of our oppressors. We will shake it off—we will cast it from us—it shall be trampled under foot as serpents should."

"They shall—they shall."

"The time is at hand; the hour is nearly come when tyranny shall crumble into dust.

and righteous liberty shall rise up triumphant." ("Hooroo!") "I hold, even now, in my possession papers from our compatriots, the Whiteboys and others, of the surrounding counties. These papers give the plans of a general rising—a rising of every true Irish heart, to crush out our enemies. The rising will take place within a month from this. The day is not yet fixed, but every man must hold himself in readiness, as if the morrow were to be the great, the glorious day of liberation."

"We're ready any minute."

"Good. And now, previous to disclosing further secrets before him, we must administer the oath of union to our new lieutenant, Maurice O'More."

All eyes were turned upon Maurice. He quietly stood up beside Brogden.

"Have ye got the form for him to sign?" whispered Maguire to Brogden.

The latter answered hurriedly.

"I have got a copy here—it will do as well; the old sheet is filled up."

Brogden turned to Maurice.

"Listen, Maurice O'More," he said ;
"our oath is solemn."

And in a low, measured tone he read it.

"In the awful presence of God, I, Maurice O'More, do truly and sincerely engage to defend my country, should necessity require ; for which purpose I am willing to join the society of Rathboys, to learn the use of arms, in order that equal rights and laws should be established and defended.

"I do further declare that neither hopes, fears, rewards, or punishments shall ever induce me, directly or indirectly, to inform or give evidence against any member or members of this or similar societies for any act or expression of theirs, done or made, collectively or individually, in or out of this society, in pursuance of the spirit of this obligation. So help me God." *

To break that oath was to sin against everything holy.

* From the Report of the Committee of Secrecy, 1801.

"Now," said Brogden, spreading out the paper on the table, where Maguire had placed pen and ink, "do you, solemnly and sincerely, with your heart in the work, and with full knowledge of its dangers, accept this oath of union?"

Maurice seized the pen.

"Hold! I forbid it," cried a loud, stern voice.

"And who the blazes are you?"

"Look and see."

The little man, at the far end of the table, had risen; he had dropped the old hat and cloak; and there, standing coolly, within twenty feet of him, Maurice beheld the strange being in order to find whom he was on the point of signing that oath at which his blood curdled.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN-HUNT.

Under the silver eyes of night,
With measured oars, as swift as light,
They chased the solitary gnome
Towards its gloomy mountain home.

Story of the Dark Ladye.

THERE was something inexpressibly startling in this sudden appearance of the Boccagh. There was something awing in the manner in which he stood in the midst of his enemies, cool, calm, demanding obedience.

The men, impregnated as their minds were with superstition, opened their mouths and their eyes, and looked wonderingly at him, without moving.

Brogden, foaming at the mouth with rage, stood with his hand upon the paper of the Rathboy declaration, and staring wildly at the intruder.

Even Maurice was spell-bound. With the pen still in his hand, he stood, as it were, transfixed.

A calm, loud-toned voice came pealing along the chamber.

"I forbid this ceremony. Maurice O'More, in signing that declaration you are signing your own death warrant."

Brogden drew a pistol. Cormac continued, unheeding. "There is more in this than you suspect." The pistol was at full cock. "There is a deep laid plot for your destruction." Brogden took aim. "For that man, who stands beside you asy our friend, is——"

Brogden fired.

"Upon him, lads," he shouted.

The report of the pistol appeared to have recalled the men to their senses. There was the smoke; there was a loud shuffling of feet, as if a struggle were going on.

The smoke cleared away. At the further end of the apartment a number of men were crowded together in a fierce

scuffle, but the Boccagh was not among them.

"Bedad, he's gone," shouted one of the men, who were now staring bewilderedly at one another.

"Gone?" screamed Maurice, leaping on to the table to reach the other end of the chamber.

"Not that way," shouted Brogden, stopping him, "he has escaped by the still-room. Follow me, and we'll have him yet."

He led the way to the principal entrance, closely followed by Maurice, Conolly, Maude in her disguise, and the others. They quickly ascended the ladder and rushed down to the beach, where the exit from the still-room was situated.

A loud shout of chagrin announced the discovery of Cormac in a boat rowing towards the opposite shore.

The boats of the Rathboys lay at a slight distance from this spot, and several minutes elapsed before one of them could be un-

moored and manned. At length they pushed off—six men rowing with all their might, Maurice and Brogden at the prow with guns ready, and Maude keeping close to Conolly in the stern.

“Pull, boys, pull,” cried Maurice, excitedly; “pull—we are gaining upon him. There will be twenty crowns to each man if we capture him, besides the reward of a hundred pounds that has been already offered. Bend to it, boys—every stroke gains on him. I can see him now.”

Thus stimulated the men plied their oars with the utmost vigour.

Conolly looked anxiously towards the object of their pursuit.

Maurice spoke not a word. His eyes were steadily fixed upon the boat ahead. His hand now firmly grasped his gun. He was watching for the first opportunity to fire. Presently he raised his gun to his shoulder. Conolly eyed him anxiously.

Slowly, and with great precision, he took aim and fired.

The smoke cleared away.

Maurice and Brogden gave a joyful shout. Conolly sprang to his feet as if to obtain a clearer view.

In the dim light no form was visible in the boat which they were pursuing.

"You've done for him this time," said Brogden with an exulting laugh.

"Holy Mother! what is that?" cried Maurice.

The boat in which the Boccagh had been so recently standing, was, without any visible rower, still moving on, if possible, more rapidly than before. On quietly it glided, propelled by some strange, invisible power.

It was well that the men who were so lustily plying their oars in pursuit of the mysterious boat knew nothing of the phenomenon; had they known it they would have dropped their oars in consternation.

Brogden and Maurice looked at each other in mute surprise.

Conolly drew a long breath as if relieved.

"Well," Brogden muttered at length ; "fairy-child or not, he certainly does do some queer things. At any rate I don't think he's quite killed yet."

The two boats glided on. The pursuers were still gaining fast upon their prey.

Maurice reloaded his gun.

"Saints be praised !" he suddenly cried ; "yonder is the end of our journey."

He pointed to a long rocky shore, which lay right ahead of the boats ; if they continued in their present course, they must strike upon the central rock.

"He would be worse to catch on land than on the water," said Brogden.

"On land ?" exclaimed Maurice. "Why, it is impossible for him to land there—the rocks are almost perpendicular."

"Don't be too sure that he can't land anywhere."

"Well, it will soon be decided now."

They were within fifty feet of the fugitive boat. They saw it closing upon the rocks,

and the distance rapidly decreased between the pursuers and pursued.

There was a shout.

Cormac's boat had struck upon the rock. They were now within twenty feet of it.

There was another shout—this time of astonishment.

Standing straight up in the boat, with the heavy oar upraised in his hand, they beheld the Boccagh. For a moment, he appeared to gaze contemptuously at his pursuers, who were now so close upon him.

Then, wielding the heavy oar high above his head, he brought it down with terrible force, and crushed it through the bottom of his boat, which immediately began to fill with water.

"By dash!" cried Brogden, "he's sinking the boat."

"He cannot climb that rock," cried Maurice. "At any rate, we can reach him before he does. See! his boat is almost level with the water."

In his excitement Maurice dropped his gun.

Cormac stood so calmly in his boat, whilst it was sinking so fast, that they began to think he had some intention of drowning himself.

They were within three yards of him. Another stroke of the oars, and they might have knocked him down.

But just at that moment there was a gurgling sound—a great swirl, and the boat went down.

At the same time, with a bound like that of a tiger, the Boccagh fastened upon the almost perpendicular rock, and began to ascend in the most amazingly rapid manner.

The pursuing boat touched the rock. Maurice sprang to his feet; he almost touched Cormac.

With a wild cry, and with the nerve and courage of desperation, he sprang upon the rock.

Brogden shoved the boat off a piece, in order to watch the proceedings.

Maurice found, to his surprise, some small holes and crevices, into which he got his hands and feet, and thus climbed with a speed not much behind that of the Boccagh.

Up, up went the two men—Maurice very close upon his prey. The eyes of all in the boat below were fixed upon this strange chase.

The hands of Cormac were on the top of the rock. Maurice made a clutch at him.

But Cormac possessed extraordinary power in his arms, and with ease swung his body on to the top of the precipice, and was safe.

Maurice made a convulsive effort to get up in the same manner. Half of his body appeared over the top of the rock, and then his hand slipped, his body swayed in the air.

Cormac turned swiftly round and grasped at him.

Those in the boat shouted angrily ; they thought he had knocked him over ; for at

that moment Maurice rolled head-first down the rock, into the Lough.

Cormac looked down at him as he disappeared under the water.

The boat was pulled up close to the spot at which he had disappeared. He came up.

Brogden, who was at the prow, made a grab at him. He missed, and Maurice sank for the second time, leaving the water crimson with blood.

Again he appeared above water, and Brogden made another grab at him, missing as before, and Maurice, who was evidently insensible, again sank.

"St. Patrick and the plague! the boy will be drowned if you play with him that way."

As he spoke Phelim Conolly advanced to the prow of the boat, and roughly hustled Brogden aside; then leaning over, half into the water, watched for the next rising of the body.

The pale face of Maurice, with his thick

black hair clustering upon his brow, clammy with blood, appeared for one moment.

But that moment was enough. Conolly clutched eagerly at the drowning form, and succeeded in gripping the hair.

He dragged the body to the side of the boat, and then, with the assistance of Brogden, lifted it in.

Cormac had been standing on the point of the precipice, watching these proceedings. He now disappeared. The attention of his late pursuers was quite withdrawn from him, and even if they had observed him, there was not one who, after the accident to Maurice, would have attempted to climb that rock in pursuit.

"By the frogs! I'm afraid the poor boy's done for," muttered Conolly.

"Pull to the nearest landing-place!" cried Brogden.

The men turned the prow of the boat, and rowed towards the north shore.

Maurice was severely injured. He had received from some sharp edge of a rock a

deep gash in the left side of the head, which rendered the probability of his recovery very doubtful.

Conolly gently held up the body, and Maude, with a strong nerve and a kind impulse, closed up the wound and bound a large handkerchief tightly over it, so as to stop the bleeding. Then Conolly took a flask from his pocket and poured some of its contents down the throat of the insensible man. The effect was not immediate, but after a little the lips quivered slightly, and the heart began to beat faintly.

"St Patrick be thanked," said Conolly, fervently, as he perceived these symptoms of returning life.

The boat now reached the shore at a point at which it was easy to land. Conolly carried Maurice from the boat and laid him flat upon the grass. Then he proceeded to chafe his hands and rub him down.

At length there came a deep sigh, and

the eyelids trembled and slightly opened. Brogden stood by looking on.

"Are you any better? Can you speak?" inquired Conolly, with much rough kindness.

There was no answer, and the eyes closed again.

"I'm afraid it'll be all over with him soon," said Conolly in a whisper to Brogden.

"And what the dash are we to do with him. They'll kick up such a fuss about him. Better to have left him in the water."

"No, by St Patrick, not while there was a chance of saving his life."

"You seem anxious about him," muttered Brogden, sneeringly. "What are we to do with him?"

"Why get him conveyed to his father's house."

Brogden called the men. They came up from the boat, and under Conolly's instructions they quickly prepared a rude

litter, upon which the deathlike form of O'More was placed.

Four men raised the litter upon their shoulders. Piper Rooney undertook to act as a guide, and the party started with their sad burden.

Slowly picking their steps they wended their way along the side of the dark lough; and in the farm, away over the hills, there was an old man on his knees praying to heaven to protect his son. What a dreary awakening would it be for that old man when the litter was carried into the house.

After watching the litter-bearers out of sight, Conolly turned to Brogden.

"Where now?" he asked.


"Back to Kitty Mullins's as quick as we can; I want to speak to the boys, if they are not gone. Hark you, Conolly, I am determined to put an end to these tricks of Cormac. He once swore goodwill to me. He has broken his vow, and, by dash, I shall not keep mine."

CHAPTER IV.

AN ORPHAN BOY.

No parent's hand, with pious care,
My childhood's devious steps to guide.

J. P. Curran.

T Kitty Mullins's they found that those of the boys who had not been able to join the pursuit across the lough had retired to their homes under the impression that there would be no further business transacted that night.

Brogden seated himself moodily by the fire in Kitty's cabin. He drank in sullen silence from the mug with which the hostess supplied him. Conolly also sat by the fire, his protégé lurking in the shadow behind him. Maguire was busy coaxing Kitty to lengthen his score.

By-and-bye Brogden raised his head and fixed his keen, sharp eyes upon Conolly.

"Look here," he said, "I've a notion, Conolly, that you know more about this cursed imp than any of us."

"Me? I don't know any more about him than you do."

"Well I was mistaken. I thought otherwise."

"Of course," added Conolly in a softened voice—"of course if I did know anything I should be at your service; but you see I don't."

"Humph," and Brogden was again silent.

On any other occasion Conolly would have indignantly resisted the attempt to make him disclose any secrets with which a friend had intrusted him. For though ready for anything which could be done in a fair, open way, he would never consent to do any underhand kind of work. As the reader is aware, he did know something about the Boccagh. But he did not wish to betray his knowledge; and on the present occasion, having a purpose of his own to serve, he did not wish to offend Brogden.

Therefore he bluntly told a lie, which was the only escape he saw open.

Brogden was not convinced by Conolly's denial. Accustomed himself to use deceit he believed every one with whom he came in contact to be deceitful. He thought it probable that he might yet so work upon Conolly that he would obtain his assistance. And if he did not, why, he could do without. Perhaps he knew more than Conolly himself.

His countenance cleared, and he rose to his feet.

"Well I'll go," he said lightly. "There's no use remaining here. Maguire, you must find out if the keep is clear; we return there immediately. The boys must be kept in readiness for this rising, which will take place soon."

Brogden was about to move towards the door.

Conolly called to him.

"Can you stop a minute? I want to speak to you."

"What about?"

"You see," Conolly went on, "I've picked up a poor boy, whose parents are dead, and who has no relations in the world that he knows of."

"What have I to do with that? He doesn't suppose I am a relation?"

"Oh, no. Only this—he wants to enter your service, and to join our band, so that he may be of use to you at all times."

"Where is he?"

"Here."

Maude stepped forward, and Brogden started in amaze.

"What's the matter?" inquired Conolly, innocently.

"Nothing—nothing. Where does the boy come from?"

"Come from? Oh just over here by Rathlin."

Brogden examined the disguised Maude closely.

She held herself under strong control, for she felt all her blood rushing to her face,

and a great inclination to tremble violently. Still she stood firmly the scrutinising gaze which Brogden had fixed upon her.

When he had first glanced at her he had been struck by her features. His thoughts at once flew to Banbally. Could it be possible that Maude—No, no; her hair was raven black—the boy's was quite red; her skin was white—the boy's was brown and sun-burnt. Besides, there was not the slightest chance of a high-bred young lady turning into a rude, uncultivated peasant boy. It was certainly a striking resemblance in the form of features—but that was all.

“What's your name?” he inquired suddenly.

Maude stammered a little in her reply, and spoke hoarsely, for she was trying to assume a rough voice.

“Dennis Delaney, if ye please, sir.”

She almost made a curtsey, but fortunately recollected herself in time, and turned it into a twist of the body which

might have been taken for a rude bow.

Conolly was watching all with deep anxiety.

"And so you want to enter my service, eh?"

"Yes, sir—if ye please, sir."

"And to join the Rathboys?"

"Yes, sir—if ye please, sir."

Another awkward bow with the answer to each of these questions.

"Your parents are dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did they die?"

Conolly broke into the conversation, for he began to see that this first trial was becoming too much for Maude.

"It is not long since they died. You see, the old man caught the fever, and couldn't work. He was kept in bed for a long time, and almost everything was sold off, in order to keep the family in bread. But the rent fell due, and Danny Jordan—fiends take him—would hear of no excuse.

He gave them notice that they would have to quit if they couldn't pay both rent and tithes at once. They could not pay, so the bed was hauled from beneath the sick man, and they were all turned out of the house, without a penny to get a bite of food, or a covering for their heads."

"That was hard," said Brogden. "I'm thinking, Dennis, you will not be very fond of the proctor."

"I'd like to strangle him," said Maude, assuming the rage which she knew was in accordance with the part she played.

"Humph. I like you for that. The proctor is no friend of mine, either."

Conolly was delighted with the success of his imaginative powers.

"Well, you see," he continued, determined to finish the story properly, "a neighbour, just as poor as themselves almost, with good heart, gave them shelter. But the man died in a day, and the mother, with a child at her breast, followed him. So this poor boy here was left without a

friend ; and I found him on the hill side of Bragh, crying his eyes out. I spoke to him, found out his story, and thought that you might want a smart young fellow about you, who would be ready to do anything for you. That's how he came here, and that's how I've taken an interest in him."

Brogden turned his eyes from Conolly again upon Maude.

"He looks a smart sort of lad, too."

"I'll answer for that," said Conolly.

"How can you answer? You scarcely know him yet."

"Oh, yes, I do. I've had my eye on him for some time past, and he has been with me for the last two days."

"Well, I daresay I might find something for him to do. Have you been taught anything?"

"I can groom a horse," said Maude. She spoke without hesitation now.

"I suppose you are ready to turn your hand to anything—eh?"

"Yes, sir ; if you please, sir."

"Ah, then, I'll find some work for you about myself."

"Oh, thank ye, sir—thank ye ; and an orphan boy's blessing be on ye."

"Ha ! ha ! We'll not mind that. You can keep a secret, I suppose ?"

"Ay," replied Maude, with clenched teeth, "like death."

"You'll do. Consider yourself in my service, henceforth. As to your getting in among the patriots, we must see the Captain about that ; if he consents, you must be ready at all times to obey him, as you would me. You'll agree to that—eh ?"

"Oh yes, sir ; of course, sir."

"Then that's settled. Are you satisfied, Conolly ?"

"Quite. By the frogs, Brogden, you have done me a good turn ; for I have a greater interest in that boy's welfare than you can imagine."

"Does he own any kinship in you ?" asked Brogden, laughing.

"No, by St. Patrick! But I wish he did; he wouldn't be here."

"All right," said Brogden, as if amused. He added, addressing Maude, "Now, then, my gossoon, will you go with me to Abbey Hall to-night, or wait till to-morrow?"

Maude hesitated—she could not help it. But it was only for a moment.

"If you please, sir, I'll go with ye to-night."

"Very well; we'll go now. Good night, Conolly—good night, Kitty."

"Good night to your honour, and a safe journey to ye," returned the active Kitty.

The party left the cabin. Maguire and Murphy hauled the boat down to the water, and then took the oars.

Brogden, as before, sat in the prow. He leant his elbow upon the side, and looked over into the dark depths of the water—down into the unfathomable depths, emblematic of the dark thoughts which were passing in his own mind.

Maude was at a little distance from him,

with her face turned towards his. By the dim light of the stars, she could see his face, and note its expression. She watched that sallow, close-shaven face, with its eyes fixed upon the water; and a sad foreboding took possession of her soul, that there all happiness for her was at an end.

Her heart beat tumultuously. She was still a woman. She had been sorely tried in supporting the character she had assumed, and she had borne up bravely.

But the trial was still more severe now.

There, sitting before her, was the only being whom she valued upon this earth—his face pale, and sorrow evidently in his breast. She saw this; and she yearned, with a wild, passionate yearning, to throw herself upon his neck, and offer him a true woman's sympathy—a true woman's love.

But, to gnaw at her heart-strings and to torture her very soul, rose up before her that demon of Jealousy, and standing darkly behind was the phantom Hate.

Was not his sadness for her rival? So

spoke Jealousy. Had he not betrayed her?
So murmured Hate.

So the boat moved onward to the other shore.

Phelim Conolly stood at the door of the cabin of Kitty Mullins. That lady had been perfectly astounded at his moderate consumption of the favourite beverage.

He stood with a deep gloom upon his rough, bearded face. He heard the splash of oars, and he knew the boat was gone. Then, with clenched teeth, he growled out the words—


“I HATE THAT MAN.”

CHAPTER V.

AN OLD SCORE SETTLED.

"Pity her plaints whose wailing voice is broken,
Whose finger holds our early wedding token,
The torrents of whose tears have drained their fountain,
Whose piled up grief on grief is past recounting,
Ulla gulla, gulla gone!"

A Munster Keen.

 DULL light, in strange contrast with the usual fierce glare, burned in the dark eyes of Anasthause. She sat by the fire, her face cold and stern. The thin lips were clenched close together, and her lean hands, clasped tight in each other, lay upon her lap.

She had promised—she would try to keep her promise, and subdue the evil passions to which the memory of the past gave rise. Only for him—only for Cormac, would she have done this.

He had rung the promise from her— wrung it from her with hard words and bitter threats; but she would try to keep it—she would try to keep it.

Ailleen stirred. The quick eyes of Anasthause were instantly upon her.

Slowly the covering was lifted from that fair, beautiful face, more lovely in the pale sadness which had now settled upon it. Then a soft little hand appeared, and the sweet eyes opened to behold the first hint of morning creeping in through the chinks in the window shutter.

Then the head was turned slowly round, and the eyes were fixed upon Anasthause. For a few minutes she looked as if she did not comprehend where she was. But the sorrow was too deep for even long refreshing sleep to dull the knowledge of it for any time. Ailleen remembered all immediately.

“Has he returned yet?” she asked, in a low, weak voice.

“No.”

The reply was quick, perhaps half angry. Aileen looked with a sad, wistful wonder at her strange companion.

"Will he be long now?" she again asked, in a low, weak voice.

"I can't say."

The answer was more subdued this time.

But the answer contained bitterness for Aileen.

"He is so very long," she murmured. "It is cruel—cruel. He has promised to tell me all upon his return, and he must know how much I yearn for his tidings."

And as she spoke, the pale face flushed, bringing back the semblance of the two red roses which so recently bloomed upon her cheeks.

"Are you better?" Anasthause inquired, abruptly.

"Much better, thanks to you."

"No thanks to me—they are not my due; and if they were, I don't want them."

"To whom, then, shall I give them?"

"To Cormac give all. Yon have more to thank him for than ye dream of."

Again the voice was quick, half angry, and Aileen remained silent.

She lay watching those straggling rays of morning light, and listening with a deep intensity for the footsteps of her liberator. She thought of the parents whom she would now see so soon; of the lover from whom she had been so long parted, and her heart beat fast.

But what was this great misery which she had been told she had yet to bear?

"Do you know what he has to tell me?" she asked.

"May be—part."

"Will you tell me what you know?" she said, eagerly.

"No—it is his secret, not mine, and—I dare not."

"It is something very dreadful?"

"It is."

"Poor Cormac."

The words were spoken like a plaintive sigh, and Anasthause eyed her keenly.

"You pity him?"

"I do—for the great love he bears me."

The old fierce light was returning to the woman's eyes. The evil spirit of the past was in possession of her soul.

"And for that love I hate you."

Aileen started. She looked at the fierce face before her, and shuddered.

"Hate me," she murmured, in a weak, trembling tone.

"Ay, for you have drawn him away from me; you have parted his heart from me—perhaps will part our lives."

"No, no."

"You have embittered his soul, and left him nothing but misery; you have been the curse of his dark life."

"The holy saints know how little I am to blame for this; and oh, did you but know, could you but see, how my heart aches for him, you would pity me, not hate."

"But there is wrong, bitter wrong done me in the past."

"But not by me."

"No, but you are the ever-present remembrance of that wrong; and, therefore, child of the O'Sullivans, do I hate ye."

Aileen wrung her hands despairingly.

"Oh, woe, woe, why am I thus doomed to suffer for the sins of others?"

"Fear nothing," said Anasthause, darkly.

"Whilst ye are here ye are in safety. The man to whom ye have wrought so much sorrow here protects ye; my wrongs, my griefs are all subdued for his sake."

"Tell me—tell me, I beseech ye, in what I have done you harm that I may redeem the past."

"Ye can never call the dead back to life, neither can you heal the wounds that have lacerated my heart and left me what I am."

"I would try—with all my life I would try—to soften the roughness of the days that you have yet to live."

There was a strange expression about the countenance of Anasthause. The hard lines about her mouth twitched spasmodically. The brows knit and the hands worked convulsively. She turned fiercely upon Aileen.

"Listen, child. Since you seek to know I shall not hide the evil I have suffered. There is some secret power moving me to disclose to you the dark secret of my life. Part ye shall know."

"Tell me then what little you may."

Anasthause clasped her hands around her knees, and swayed her body to and fro as she spoke.

"Once I was young and fair, even as ye are. I was not always the foul thing that now ye see me. The men of our village thought me comely, and many sought me for a wife. We were rough people all of us—not like what ye are. We had little schooling, save in learning to earn an honest living by hard toil; but even amongst us—brutes as some gentle people

would call us—even among us there was such a thing as love.”

She paused, still rocking herself; and now she turned her eyes upon the fire. Her voice lost much of its sharp harshness—it was low, and there was a touch of sadness in its tone.

“Out of the many that sought me, my heart fixed itself upon one who came amongst us from a distant county. He lingered with us many days, and I thought that he was mine. He left us, and when next I heard of him he was married. With a deep shame upon me then I fled my kindred. They have never seen or heard of me since. I saw him once more. I cursed him, prophesying ruin to him and his. Then I came here to live out the curse. It is almost fulfilled.”

Anasthause gave vent to one of those low, malicious chuckles which so grated upon the ear. Aileen trembled violently.

“But this—I do not see what I have to do with this.”

"Don't ye? Then I'll tell ye. That man who made my life a bitterness was your father."

"Holy Mother, protect me and give me strength."

"Ay, ay—pray for strength. Ha, ha—now do ye understand why it is I hate ye?"

"Oh, I could curse ye now, with all these fiends of memory thronging upon my brain. They set it on fire—it is burning now, and can scarcely keep down the curse that is rising to my lips. Hide yourself, hide from me, for the foul fiend himself is prompting me to blast you."

She ceased. Her lips closed tightly. She leant her head forward upon her hands, and with a deep, gloomy expression she sat silently gazing upon the ground.

How those old memories had troubled her soul; and now, in disclosing them to this girl, she felt a deeper, heavier woe.

Aileen crept softly over to Anasthause and put her arms round the old woman's neck. The woman tried to put her away.

Her hold tightened, and she would not be shaken off.

"Have pity on me," she said sadly.

"I hate you."

"You say you loved my father," Aileen persevered, "and I believe you; then think of the time of your love—think of the sweet unselfishness, its womanly hope, its tender dreams, and I believe you will forget your wrongs. Love is unselfish, single-hearted. It survives through all sorrows, all changes. It is sufficient in itself. Trample on it, bruise it, you do not kill it—it can never die. It is like a flower, and if you trample on it you make its odour the sweeter. Oh, pity me—pity me. Forget your wrongs and think of your young days, and you will pity me."

Anasthause darkened.

"It is the memory of those young days which makes me hate you. Because when I look upon your young face I think of what I was and what I might have been."

"Surely such thoughts should soften, not harden you."

"No. They drive me mad. Away."

Ailleen turned away weeping.

Anasthause, violently agitated, rocked herself to and fro on her stool before the fire.

Suddenly Ailleen fell on her knees, clasping her hands and lifting her face to Heaven.

"Oh, merciful powers above, look gently down on this afflicted life ; soften this dark woman's heart, that she may learn thine infinite charity. Pity her, pardon her, lead her back to the light ; for her soul is dark with wicked wrath, and her heart is burning fire."

Ailleen started with a scream, for a low, choking voice spoke in her ear.

"It is enough, Ailleen O'Sullivan. You have conquered. The Lord have mercy upon me, for I swear by His book that I will be your friend."

Ailleen turned and looked with surprise

upon the face of Anasthause. That face had softened into love and pity, and the eyes were full of tears.

Strange, unaccountable change.

Ailleen rose with a cry of joy and smiled with ineffable tenderness and thanksgiving. A moment more and the fair girl and the old woman, weeping audibly, were folded in each other's arms.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROCTOR DOES A LITTLE BUSINESS.

Good luck to you, don't scorn the poor, and don't be their
despiser,

For worldly wealth soon melts away, and cheats the very
miser.

J. C. Mangan.

THE brief note which the proctor, Jordan, had forwarded to Brogden had produced the proper effect. Negotiations were at once opened for the recovery of the important packet, and in the course of the negotiations the proctor, after a visit to Justice Morgan, presented himself at Abbey Hall about noon on the day following the night of Maurice's mishap.

The servant proceeded to announce the visitor, and when he entered his master's room Brogden was seated in an arm chair by the window. Maude, in her boy's

dress, stood before him receiving some instructions.

"Mr. Jordan, the proctor, sir," said the man.

Brogden jumped to his feet.

"Oho, the old fox has come out of his kennel," he exclaimed. "Show him up."

The servant departed.

"You may go, Dennis; come back to me when this man is gone."

"Yes, sir."

And with one of her feigned awkward bows she retired.

Just as she was closing the doors behind her Jordan came up the stairs and they met. The proctor started back. He recognised the features at once.

Maude was at a loss; her quick ingenuity stood her in good stead. She opened her mouth and eyes wide and stared stupidly at the proctor. He continued to gaze in wonder. The form of those features, so like; the figure—well, that might be a boy's; but the bust, that

was a woman's or very like it. But the boobyish stare perplexed him.

"Please, sir, is there anything the matter with ye?" asked the boy in a coarse voice.

Jordan opened his little eyes to their full extent. That certainly was not her voice.

"N-o," he replied slowly; "there's nothing the matter with me."

He passed on. He paused at the door of Brogden's room. He looked round; the boy was slowly descending the stairs, occasionally gazing up at him with that dull, stupid look.

"I can't understand this," muttered Jordan, scratching his head.

He turned the handle of the door and entered.

When the door had closed Maude sprang up the stairs again with an agitated countenance. She looked along the lobby, over the bannisters—there was no one in sight. She crept close to the door.

The moment the proctor entered Brogden's room he was himself again. Here was a plain matter of business which he understood fully. Here was no perplexity.

Brogden spoke gaily to his guest.

"Glad to see you, Jordan."

"Are you?"

It was a dry manner of returning such a pleasant salutation, but Brogden did not mind it.

"Well, I suppose you have come to your senses, eh?"

"Oh, yes; I've come to my senses a long time ago."

"Yes; but I mean on the score of that little affair of ours."

"I mean that too."

"Well, you'll give up that article?"

"Certainly."

"Now, that's what I call being sensible."

"So do I."

Brogden walked to a sideboard and returned with brandy and glasses.

"Now that we have come to this amicable conclusion, suppose you drink something?"

"Suppose I do."

Brogden filled two glasses; he handed one to the proctor and took one himself.

"Success to you, Jordan; and may you ever show as much wit as on this occasion."

"Hope I shall," and both laughed.

"Well, how much did I say I would give?"

"I really forget."

"Twenty or thirty—which?"

"I don't know; but neither will do."

Brogden stopped the glass which he was raising to his lips.

"Why, didn't you come here to agree to my terms?"

"Oh, no," and Jordan sat quite coolly sipping his brandy.

"What the dash do you mean then?" shouted Brogden.

"This," said Jordan, quietly. "There are a hundred guineas offered for certain

disclosures, and there are rumours of that hundred being increased. Now I hold the power of making these disclosures, and thereby obtaining the reward——”

“And being roasted for your pains.”

“Perhaps. Well, these disclosures will involve you. That is nothing to me. I want money, and will sell my goods to the highest bidder. Now, you give me one hundred and fifty guineas and I'll hand all the documents over to you. That is what I mean ; and that's what I'll do.”

Brogden sat for some moments, silent.

“Oh, that's what you mean?” he said at length, with suppressed rage. “Jordan, do you know where you are?”

“Perfectly.”

“Are you aware that it is quite possible that you might accidentally tumble down-stairs?”

“Oh, quite possible,” said Jordan, with a short laugh——“quite possible. But I am very careful.”

“Your care might forsake you for once.”

"Oh, dear, no, not at all. I am always cautious."

"Indeed."

"I am a lawyer."

"Then lawyer and all as you are, you have got your head into a noose this time."

Brogden jumped up, rushed to the door, and threw it open.

Maude was not there. She had just had time enough to withdraw from the door and hurry to the further end of the lobby.

Brogden did not look out, but returned to the table. He laid his hand upon a small bell as if to ring it.

"Now, look you," he said; "one sound of this will bring hither those who will pay little respect to your lawyership. To save all trouble give up those articles."

"Why, what's the good of all this flurry?" asked Jordan, quietly, with a low laugh.

"Give up those documents," repeated Brogden, angrily, as he raised the bell.

"I haven't got them."

"Have not got them?"

"No. Why, you don't suppose I would be such a fool as to come here with them in my possession?"

"Where are they?"

"In the hands of a justice of the——"

Brogden dropped the bell, and with one bound grasped Jordan tightly by the throat. At the same moment the proctor drew a pistol from his pocket and presented it close to the breast of his assailant.

Brogden did not seem to observe the weapon.

"Then you have betrayed me?" he cried.

"No."

"Explain."

Brogden released him, but stood savagely facing him.

"How do you expect a man to speak if you have him half throttled?"

"You are free now. Go on."

"Well, I just bundled them all up in a parcel and took them up to a justice, who is a friend of mine."

"You mean Morgan?" said Brogden, sneering.

"Ay, and I told him if I did not call for them to-night to send them off post-haste to the person they are addressed to."

"Who is that?"

"The Commander-in-Chief in Kilkenny."

Brogden sat down and wiped away the perspiration from his brow. He spoke calmly.

"And you go for them to-night?"

"I must, or they'll be in the hands of the General by to-morrow afternoon."

"Good. You will go for them?"

"Yes, if you will give me a hundred and fifty."

"That's a large sum."

"Yes—but you not only get the papers that you know about, but you also get the bond upon the estate——"

Brogden started.

"The bond? How came you by that?"

"Your father gave it to me to raise the returns for him when it was first drawn up."

"Dash him."

"Let the old gentleman rest; he's got enough to bother him without your curses."

Brogden ground his teeth.

"Your father died," Jordan went on; "and the bond remained in my hands, though you have drawn the returns. That bond has long since been over-paid, and your possession of Abbey Hall is a swindle."

"Mind what you are saying."

Jordan gave a little dry laugh.

"Oh, we are alone and can speak freely."

Brogden rose hastily and closed the door.

"Very well," he said; "I'll give you this money on condition that I receive the original bond and the others."

"You'll have them. Give me the money."

"Why should I trust you any more than you trust me? I'll give you the money when I receive its equivalent."

Jordan rose.

"Call upon me to-morrow at twelve, then," said the proctor.

"I cannot. You must wait. I'll have to go to Kilkenny and raise the money."

"Well, in two days?"

"Longer. Say a fortnight?"

"Remember, if the Crown offer increases so does mine."

"You'll have it."

"Then it's settled. Good day, Mr. Brogden."

Brogden nodded, and the proctor bowed himself out of the room, hurried down stairs, on to his cob, and was off.

"So, so," muttered Brogden, "the wily fox has got me again. Curse that bond. And paid up too; and the estate reverts to Phelim Conolly. By dash, I'll be upsides with the fox this time."

And he clenched his fist savagely.

Dennis entered.

"Go down stairs," said Brogden, "and tell Shamus I want him."

In a few minutes Shamus entered the apartment, carefully closing the door after him. Maude was again outside.

"Shamus," said Brogden, "that proctor, dash him, is becoming the pest of my life."

"Well, get rid of him," was the easy advice.

"I mean to, so you get our own men together to-night."

"Any of the boys would be glad to do for him."

"Yes; but I have a particular reason for not trusting them any more than in that other affair."

"As ye please. I'll have our own boys ready."

"Good. To-night, at dark."

"All right. We'll do the business for him."

"And I must prevent it," muttered Maude as she hastily withdrew from the door, seeing that Shamus was about to come forth.

This time she did not descend. She went up to the next landing; she seated herself at the lobby window; she looked out over the green fields—over the great bogs.

“Oh, black, black heart,” she murmured, in a low, agonised tone. “Why is it that I still love, and am miserable? Why can I not hate and be happy? Are not the horrors which I have already learned enough to turn me from him? Merciful heaven help me, for my heart still clings with strange stubborn love to this wretched man.”

Brogden paced his apartment with a dark, brooding countenance. He was dreaming of his triumphs; not of that alone. He had other serious matters to trouble him. But the recovery of those documents was uppermost.


“I have him this time,” he muttered, “he will get these things to-night; he will have them in his house. The fox is caught at last.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE REVELATION.

"Awaken, Una Phelimy,
How canst thou slumber so,
How canst thou dream so quietly,
Through such a night of woe?"

Samuel Ferguson.

ILLEEN and Anasthause sat down by the fire and talked in whispers—Anasthause senile, Ailleen fearful lest the old woman should again change.

But the springs of that icy nature had been thawed. The heart of Anasthause had been melted into tears.

In the worst of us there are no depths which sympathy does not sometimes succeed in sounding. In these depths lie the spirits of lost joy and faith, and the homeless ghost of departed youth. Invoke these spirits, and the hardest and most

obdurate nature remembers its forgotten instincts, and becomes purified.

Anasthause had been tried bitterly ; but she was human. Many of the better qualities of womanhood still survived in the dark recesses of her soul. One of these was her strange sacrificial love for the Boccagh.

And Ailleen's voice, the voice of a weak girl, had been the breath from heaven that had stirred the depths of her nature and quickened its better part.

The day was nearly spent before Cormac returned.

He walked to the fire without lifting his eyes, and put his gun aside. Then he sat down, and did not speak. His face was pale, his eyes were bright, his body was soaked with the night mists. He shivered from head to foot as with cold.

Anasthause sat down ; and Ailleen, not speaking a word, fixed her large, beautiful eyes on the outcast.

At length the hands were slowly plucked

away from the dark face, and the head was lifted. Mercy. His face was white as a ghost. The lurid light of the eyes, was slowly turned upon the old woman.

Anasthause felt the look, though her eyes were averted.

She rocked herself to and fro yet more wildly, and gave a low moan at intervals.

Cormac started, trembling. His look brightened in intensity. Slowly, strangely, he became conscious of the change that had taken place in the woman.

"Cormac," it was Aileen who spoke, and her voice was low and eager.

But he, like one in a perplexed dream, continued to look at Anasthause, who stirred as if in pain.

"Take your eyes away," she moaned. "Take your eyes away, bird of ill omen. Ye come like a shadow over my heart and make a fiend of me."

Aileen clutched his arm.

"Cormac, you must and shall speak to me. This silence is more awful than wrath

and danger. Have you forgotten your promise ? ”

He turned slightly, and dropped his eyes to the ground.

“ No,” he murmured.

“ Then you will answer me—you will tell me all—you will take pity on me. You dare not deceive me any longer ! ”

Cormac shuddered from head to foot, and crept closer to the fire. Anasthause rose to her feet with a low cry.

“ Hush, Ailleen O’Sullivan,” she cried. “ You are speaking to a heart as dark as that of the foul fiend. Seek not to soften it. Woe is me—woe is me. Look at him. How he turns away from ye—how he shudders at your touch. There is a curse upon him, Boccagh and demon that he is. His hands are red with the blood of the innocent. Their blood calls out for vengeance, and woe is me.”

Cormac made an appealing movement. Then his face darkened, and he frowned grimly.

"I have nursed thee in wind and snow ; I have cared for ye ; I have wept for ye," continued the old woman, wildly ; "and it's my own old heart that bleeds for ye. Would that my heart's blood could wipe out the past. But it cannot—it cannot. The blow has been struck, and the red life has been shed, and the decree of heaven has gone forth against the murderer. Woe is me."

"Murderer," repeated Aileen, wild and appalled.

Cormac trembled. Cold drops of dew stood on his brow.

"For the love of heaven, in the name of the Virgin, be silent," he cried to Anasthause. "You know not what you say."

Anasthause lifted her hand solemnly upward.

"Yonder heaven knows what has been done," she cried. "The sun, the sky, the moon and stars, and the dark earth all look wrathfully on him whose forehead bears the mark of the assassin. Every brook,

every tree, attests his sin; the very beasts are conscious of it; the dark solitudes call out against him. He is accursed."

Cormac rose wildly.

"Hush," cried Aileen. "Have pity on him."

"Leave us," said the Boccagh, sternly.

"I will not leave you," exclaimed Anasthause. "Sin and sorrow be my portion, but I have learned wisdom. I will protect the child of the O'Sullivans—ay, even as the tiger and the panther protect their young. I heed not your frowns—I heed not your threats. I have sworn atonement, and I will keep the vow."

Cormac seized her by the wrist.

"Be advised," he hissed, darkly. "My brain is on fire, and you know not what you do. Go, I say. If you fear my violence, take this as a consolation. I swear by the saints not to lay a finger on the girl."

"What do you want with her?" asked Anasthause, sharply.

"I wish to render your threat useless by making a full confession."

"Ha! Then you confess your guilt?"

"I do."

Anasthause flung her long arms into the air, and hid her face.

"Woe is me—woe is me," she moaned.

"The saints forgive ye."

And she passed behind the curtains which hid from view the inner part of the hut.

There was silence. Cormac reseated himself opposite Aileen, and crouched close to the fire. He was agitated.

"Cormac."

The voice again thrilled to the very roots of his being.

"Hush," he said. "Tell me, Aileen O'Sullivan, are you prepared to hear me?"

"I can bear anything now," was the reply. "Speak."

"Alas, but that you must know the horrible truth sooner or later, I should be silent on the subject for ever."

"You appal me."

"I would spare you this misery, Aileen; but it is for your own sake that I am about to speak. You see I tremble to approach the subject, so fearful am I of the consequences of the revelation."

She crept up to him, and looked at him with white, bloodless cheeks.

"Is it something very horrible?"

He groaned.

"So horrible, Aileen, that it would have been better to die in the cradle than have lived to hear it. So horrible, that, for your sake, I would die rather than tell it. So horrible, that I am praying heaven to protect your mind from utter despair and madness."

"Saints of heaven, help me."

"Pray to them—pray to them—for your sake and mine. We both need their help."

He seized her hand and pressed it fondly. She had neither strength nor courage to draw it away.

"Turn your eyes away, and listen."

"I am listening."

"Try to think gently of the bearer of the news. He always loved you, Ailleen; in his dark heart there was always a bright spot for you. Sooner than have caused you a pang, he would have suffered—nay, he did suffer—the tortures of perdition. You believe this?"

"I do, Cormac—I do."

"Enough. You remember the night you were stolen from your father's house?"

"Yes, yes, yes, I remember all. My dear father—my poor mother. Ah, Cormac, if you are really my friend, take me back to them."

She broke out wildly and appealingly, but his harsh, choking voice interrupted.

"Ailleen—Ailleen, try to compose yourself, or I will not speak."

"I am quite calm," she said, after a struggle.

"You ask for your father? you ask for your mother? Here is my answer." He pointed upward. "Put your question to a higher power than mine," he cried, solemnly.

"Nay, put it to themselves, if, as I believe, they are in heaven."

Aileen shrieked. "They—are—not—dead?"

"Ay, Aileen, dead—both murdered."

"Murdered!"

"Ay, the murderer's hand has struck them down in their prime; their bodies lie in the green churchyard, but their blood calls loud to the angels for vengeance. Heaven help you—heaven help you."

But she heard no more. The blue eyes were fixed in a glassy stare, the body lost its power, the lips moaned, and the unfortunate girl fell to the floor, shivering in a white swoon.

* * * *

Hours—long hours, and then a waking to a dreary, dreary void.

Cormac, with his great, passionate yearning, hung over her, with quivering pulse.

How his whole soul hung upon the moving of that senseless form! How his heart leapt up, as if it would choke him,

when the soft, silken eyelashes quivered for a moment, and then slowly, painfully opened, disclosing the tender blue eyes, vacant of all expression, quite dead, as it seemed, to all sense, though the mind had wakened from its swoon.

“Holy saints of heaven be praised,” muttered the Boccagh, with a long-drawn breath of relief.

Her face was very white; her long, fair, silken hair hung loosely over her shoulders; her bosom heaved convulsively.

Still with that blank, vacant expression, she looked all round the cabin. For a moment—only a moment—her eyes rested upon Cormac. Then her whole frame trembled; she crept away from him; back, back to the furthest corner; and she crouched down, shivering strangely.

It was as if she had been bereft of reason by the terrible revelation of the fate of her parents.

Cormac watched these various changes with deep earnestness. He dreaded that

she had become insane; and oh, the horrible thought that he had been the cause.

Still she crouched, shivering, in the corner. He approached her softly. He touched her hand.

She started to her feet with a shrill scream. Her eyes flashed fire; she rose her height; the veins upon her brow were swollen with passion, and she looked queenly beautiful in the wrath which was devouring her.

"And you—you have done this," she cried fiercely. "Oh, merciful saints, is there no lightning left in heaven to blast such a foul thing as this? Is there no power whereby I may crush him under heel—grind down his life into utter misery?"

"Aileen, Aileen," he cried in agony, "spare me."

"Spare you—you? If the dedication of my life to any sacrifice could now cast you down into everlasting perdition, I

would make that sacrifice. Oh, my brain—my brain.”

She clasped her temples tightly with her hands, and threw herself upon the settle, groaning distractedly.

Cormac stood with eyes fixed upon her. The muscles of his face twitched spasmodically, and his arms were crossed firmly upon his chest, as if to suppress the strong emotions which throbbed beneath.

Aileen moved convulsively.

“Woe, woe, woe, and bitter, bitter misery has indeed come upon me,” she moaned, in an access of her grief. “What have I done—what have I done that I should be thus sorely tried? Why—why should all this misery be visited upon me? Oh, Virgin Mother of Heaven, look down upon me in this my affliction, and help me to bear it”

And she covered her face with her hands, swaying her body to and fro, and moaning.

Cormac trembled violently, and advanced a step.

She started back with a cry:

“Do not come near me—do not come near. Pray—pray be pitiful—be merciful.”

All her great wrath had now deserted her, and she was again the soft and sorrowing Aileen. It was but a momentary flash of rage, which vented itself in words. Hers was not a nature to carry out a grand revenge; hers was the nature of the tender reed that, beneath its burden, bends, breaks, and dies.

She held up her hands, as if to shut out the sight of Cormac.

He threw himself madly, passionately at her feet. He beat the air with his arms.

“Aileen, Aileen, I am innocent—I am innocent.”

It was the wail of the heart, whose strings cracked with the cry.

Aileen dropped her hands and looked down upon the strange being at her feet.

The curtains at the further end of the apartment were hastily drawn aside, and

Anasthause stood watching in deep anxiety.

Aileen spoke in a low, hollow voice.

"And yet they are dead?"

"Ay."

"And murdered?"

"But not by me. By all my hopes of mercy—by all the wild love I bear you—by all that I have endured, and would yet endure for your sake—by all that is holy, I am innocent."

The words were spoken with too much evidence of truth to be doubted.

"Praised be the saints, glory to the Virgin Mother, his hands are clear of this black deed," muttered Anasthause, crossing herself devoutly.

"Who, then, bears the blame?" asked Aileen, in a hushed, uncertain tone.

"I—I bear it," cried Cormac. "This is the life they seek for the crime. I am believed guilty; I am charged with the deed. The hue and cry is out against me. They are hunting me like a beast of the

forest ; they have sworn to hunt me down, down to death itself. The burden has fallen heavily upon me ; but I have borne and borne until I have thought my heart would burst, and I would have called aloud for death did I not live for you. I am innocent—I am innocent.”

“Who—who, then, is guilty?”

“Brogden ; the man who, finding that he could not win you by fair means, told you he would use foul. You remember that?”

“Yes, yes, I remember now.”

“To his mad passion then is due the guilt.”

“Oh, how accursed am I in being the cause of all this misery ! I remember now, he spoke to me first when I was blindfolded—his voice was not like yours, although he called himself by your name. Ah, now—now I see it all ; and I—I am the wretched cause.”

She sobbed afresh.

“You will believe me now, Aileen ?” said Cormac, softly.

"Yes. Go on."

"That day upon which your fa——upon which you were stolen from your home Brogden made his last appeal to your pity. That day he saw my quarrel with your father; he had discovered my wild love, and he thought to find in me a ready tool. I pretended submission to his purpose, but my object was to gain a knowledge of his plans that I might save you."

"Oh, woe, woe," sobbed the poor orphan.

"That night he meant to carry you off. I could not warn your father, for he would not have believed me. I determined with the aid of some friends, to be there before Brogden, and prevent his evil work. But he suspected me, and was there before the time appointed. When I reached the farm your house was in flames, and the villains were gone with their prize. I rushed into the house and searched, but you were gone. I found Bridget M'Carthy, and carried her out of the house. Then I heard the people murmuring against me."

“Poor Cormac.”

“Saints pour blessings on you for these sweet words of pity. Everything was against me—my quarrel, my threat, my appearance there; and fearful for my life I fled hither. From a good friend I got information that you were to be conveyed to Ballybar. There are secrets of the Keep known only to myself; and by their aid I rescued you and brought you here in safety.”

As he finished the Boccagh leant his arm against the wall, and covered his face with his hand.

Aileen stretched forth her hand piteously.

“Cormac, forgive me.”

“Forgive you?”

“Ay, for the cruel wrong that I have done you in word and thought—for all that I have said to you but now. The saints know how my poor heart bleeds; but I was mad—mad.”

Cormac slowly lifted one of the outstretched hands, and impressed upon it one

long and passionate kiss, which told how freely he forgave.

"You are now able to return to the home which will henceforth be yours—I mean the home of—of——" The words seemed to be choking him ; it was a hard struggle. "The home of Maurice O'More. But before you go, I have one thing to ask."

"Name it."

"I have told you that I am believed to be the assassin. I have told you that a price has been set upon my head, and that the country is up in arms against me?"

"Yes."

"Amongst those who pursue my footsteps, seeking my heart's blood with the most rancorous hate, is Maurice O'More. It will be hard for him—it will be hard for any one to believe me innocent. Brogden is rich and powerful ; I am poor and almost friendless. I have all to struggle against and I need aid. Will you aid me?"

"With all the power that lies in a woman's heart."

"There are other matters, other griefs, of which I have yet to tell."

Aileen looked up wildly.

"More griefs, more sorrow? No, no it cannot be—heaven is not so unmerciful as to afflict me with more misery than I already bear."

Cormac paced the apartment uneasily. Anasthause had dropped the curtain, and was hid from sight.

Aileen stood with her hands clasped, her sweet face deadly pale, watching in deep suspense, the movements of the man.

"He stopped at the further end of the cabin; his head was bent, but his dark eyes were turned towards Aileen.

"No," he murmured, in an undertone, "I cannot tell her yet. I will wait; he may recover."

"For pity's sake tell me," she cried, "what new sorrow there is for me to bear. I—I think it better to know the full extent of my misfortunes now; for I am so borne down with grief that I do not think aught

else can affect me. Let me know the worst."

The voice was low, and broken with tearful sobs. It cut upon the man's heart like a two-edged sword.

He advanced towards her.

"If aught of comfort can yet enter into the darkness of your despairing soul, be comforted; you have heard the worst that concerns yourself."

"But—but you have said that you have more to tell. What is't? There—there has nothing happened to—Maurice? He is safe?"

"He is at home," said Cormac, in a hoarse voice.

"And well?" There was no reply. "You do not answer," said Aileen, in fearful, hushed tones. "There is something wrong; tell me—tell me what it is."

"He is as well as may be," was the response, in broken, guttural accents.

"Holy Mother be thanked for this little balm! Now, now, Cormac, complete your

good work, and lead me to him—my husband.”

The Boccagh writhed with sudden pain; he felt the evil spirit again rising within him. But he would quell it. His was a hard task, but he would fulfil it.

“You forget,” he said, “that you have promised to aid me.”

“And I will.”

“Then you cannot return yet. Be patient, trust me only for a few days, and, with heaven’s help, all that’s so dark now will be made clear.”


“I will trust you,” she said, after a moment of hesitation.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL FOR LOVE.

The hand that would offend thee,
My being first shall end ;
I'm living to defend thee.

Gerald Griffin.

HE night was dark. There was a deep gloom in the heavy thickness of the air which foreboded a storm.

Through the darkness, with a heart as black as the night, rode Brogden on his way to Ballybar.

He was moody and depressed ; he was angry and fierce, ready to quarrel with the keen wind which met him sharply in the teeth. He lashed the horse unmercifully, checked it, then lashed it and cursed it again.

He had been disappointed twice that evening, and his wrath was great.

He had expected that night to have freed himself from the annoyance of proctor Jordan. With his men he had gone to the proctor's house at Clarah, hoping satisfactorily to dispose of Danny Grab, and to obtain possession of the documents which that worthy was to have received from the hands of Justice Morgan.

Brogden had counted upon this—he was certain that his plan had been so carefully laid that the proctor could have no suspicion.

When he and his men reached Danny Grab's dwelling, they found, to their surprise, that the door was open. They entered—the building was searched in every corner, Brogden confined himself to the proctor's business apartment. But the men could find no trace of the wily little lawyer; and Brogden could discover nothing of the documents which he sought. The lawyer was still victorious.

How or why he had left his house, Brogden could form no idea, unless he had

by some means discovered or guessed the plot which had been laid for his destruction. But that was impossible. It could only be his own fear which suggested the probability of danger. And acting upon his fear, Jordan had wisely decamped.

But whither? The danger was imminent. Out of rage or malice he might disclose all, and then farewell to all disguise, farewell to all the safety which his position as a supposed wealthy gentleman afforded to Brogden.

The men in their rage would have razed the house to the ground. But their master forbade them; for he calculated that if Jordan found the house untouched, he would return to it, and then at another time be in his power.

With his disappointments haunting him, Brogden fiercely continued his journey.

"Everything seems to turn against me," he muttered. "My plans fail, my safety is threatened. Curse them! I should like to crush them all. I must be a fool, after all,

to allow myself to be so duped. I am too hot ; I make miscalculations at every step, and they rise against me. The great blow will come some day, at this rate. But I must ward it off—ward it off whilst there is still room for action.”

Thus muttering, he rode on.

He arrived at the Keep of Ballybar. He gave the signal, and was admitted by Maguire, who had got the fastenings of the gate put to rights again. Brogden rode into the court, where he dismounted and turned his horse loose.

The keep was again in its old position, serving as barracks for those Rathboys who were “out.” They had ensconced themselves for the night in one of the large halls, in the preserved half of the building.

Through their midst Brogden swaggered without speaking to any of them ; down the stairs, and into the apartment to which Ailleen had been formerly conveyed. Here he found Phelim Conolly and the

boy, Dennis Delaney, seated by a large fire.

The boy rose respectfully upon the entrance of his master, and Conolly nodded a salutation.

Brogden took no heed of the movements of either. He seated himself moodily, leaning his chin upon his hand. He sat gloomily mute.

A glance of intelligence passed between Conolly and the boy.

Brogden looked up.

"Give me some drink?" he said fiercely.

Dennis obeyed—drawing the liquor from a keg which stood in one corner.

"It's the only thing that helps me to get rid of these cursed thoughts. You were right, after all, Conolly; there's nothing like potheen. It makes a man out of a coward; and, best of all, it brings oblivion to all the cares of life."

He drank again and again, until it became very palpable that he was fast becoming intoxicated.

Conolly sat musing by the fire.

"Here, boy, bring—me—more," said Brogden, sottishly.

For the moment, Maude forgot her part, and answered angrily.

"You have had enough."

"What?" shouted Brogden, his suppressed rage bursting forth, glad of any object upon which to vent itself. "What! Do you dare to dictate—to me! Dash you, take that, and learn manners."

A severe blow upon the side of the head, and Maude fell heavily to the ground.

One wild cry. One wild spring over the prostrate body, and Phelim Conolly clutched Brogden fiercely by the throat.

"Murder," he shouted, hoarse with passion.

With his swift glance at the blow, the heavy fall of Maude, the thought had flashed upon him with distracting force that she was killed. For how could so fragile, so delicate a creature live after such a blow?

Brogden grappled with him. Their bodies swayed. The struggle, which would end only in the death of one or the other, was about to begin.

They paused involuntarily, and a cold shudder ran through each, as he felt a light hand laid upon his shoulder.

"If you please, gentlemen, don't be after fighting about me, because, ye see, I'm not hurt at all, at all; it was only just in stepping backwards I missed my foot and fell; and, sure, that saved me from the blow—and, sure, I had no right to speak to the master the way I did. So, if ye please, gentlemen, don't be after fighting."

Poor, brave, infatuated Maude, in her own pain she could remember to act a part; only the pain of *his* degradation could make her forget herself.

Conolly, delirious with joy at hearing her voice—at seeing her stand before him, apparently unhurt—at once released his hold.

Brogden gave himself a shake, and rubbed his throat tenderly. He was somewhat sobered by the shock he had received.

"I don't want to quarrel," he growled.

"Nor I—nor I," said Conolly, with an uneasy, nervous laugh. "I don't want to quarrel either—not I, by the frogs. And, to tell you the truth, Ben, I was not quite myself."

"How was that?"

"Why—why, you see, I had been drinking, and that was why. But we're friends again."

"Of course."

"That's right. By St. Patrick, I would not wrong a friend for the world."

"I'm glad to see that ye have agreed again, gentlemen; and it's sorry I am that I offended ye, master."

"It's all right, my boy," said Brogden; "say no more about it, but fill those two horns and bring them here."

The two men received each a goblet.

"The shamrock's blooming," said Conolly,

nodding with a faint sparkle of his old humour.

"Long may it bloom," responded Brogden.

They were about to drink, when a man entered hurriedly. Both suspended the goblets which they were raising to their lips.

"Well, Shamus," said Brogden, hastily; "what news?"

"Maurice O'More is dead," replied Shamus.

Conolly dashed the goblet to the ground.

"Dead!" he exclaimed.

"Dead!" echoed Maude.

"It's the truth."

"Who told you?" inquired Conolly, drawing his breath painfully.

"An old man that belongs to the farm. I just met him coming out of the house, with a face as white as snow, and he told me that the young master was dead."

"Bravo, Shamus!" exclaimed Brogden, exultantly. "That's brave news. The girl shall be mine after all. Bravo!"

And he drank joyfully. It was well that he did not observe the strange expression which at that moment passed over the face of the boy, Dennis Delaney.

Brogden did not seek to restrain the evidence of his gratification at the news of the death of Maurice O'More; nor could he have restrained it even had he desired. The joy was too great, too sincere, to be hidden. It would out; it would show itself.

His path was now clear of the principal obstruction, he thought. Aileen would be his. He did not for one moment doubt his capability of winning her heart, once the man she now loved was removed by death. Neither did he doubt his power of gaining possession of her from Cormac, now that he had to seek her for himself.

He knew that the Boccagh loved her; but she would never return that passion. He also knew that Cormac would endeavour to keep her from him. But it would be impossible to do so long, when Brogden put forth his strength in real earnest. The imp

was in his grasp ; he could crush him at any moment if he pleased. He did not doubt it.

As for Maude, he scarcely thought of her. She would be hurt a little at first ; but she would soon come round. He had no trouble in that quarter. How little did he really know of woman's heart—least of all, the heart which he had so unworthily won ?

If she made any noise, he would tell her the truth at once. He did not care for her ; had not cared for her this long time. He had liked her well enough at first ; but she had yielded too hastily, too easily to his suit ; and he had lost all zest. Thus ever : the jewel lightly won is lightly valued.

Again and again he filled the horn-cup with the fiery liquor ; and again and again, did he empty it. He laughed outright ; laughed madly at the fire ; and called upon Conolly to join in his mirth. And with each cup he became more inarticulate,

approached nearer and nearer to the last stage of inebriation.

In her boy's clothes—with a racking pain in her head from the rough blow she had received from his hand, but with a still more racking pain within her tender bosom, from a still rougher, crueller blow, dealt by the same hand—Maude sat apart watching the 'mad orgie, wishing, but not daring to speak.

When at last she saw him fall to the ground, she sprang forward with a low cry, as of pain, and raised his senseless head between her soft hands.

Then she took off her boy's jacket, and rolling it up in a bundle, placed it under the man's head with a deep, unutterable tenderness. She could do nothing more, save watch for his awaking to sense.

She was kneeling by his side holding one of his hands between her own, when gradually her head drooped forward, and occasionally her body heaved and throbbed as if she were sobbing.

In this position she remained a long time: it might be, praying; it might be, only weeping for her own exceeding misery. Where was all her fierce passion now? Where Jealousy—where Hate? All gone. All, for the time being, forgotten, in the one thought of watching, sheltering, that inanimate human lump.

There was a sound behind her, as of a big heart-breaking sob, and a long painful-drawn breath.

Slowly she raised her head, and through the glistening tears, which almost blinded her red swollen eyes, she saw the pale face of Phelim Conolly watching her, with a deep yearning earnestness of sympathy—of love.

“Phelim!”

What memory stole upon her, what reflection flashed through her mind, that she gave vent to that sharp, keen cry of agony? Did she, as she met that sad face, draw a comparison between what might have been with the old, and what was with the new love? Perhaps.

But that one word, uttered like a cry, rang through the stony chamber like the snapping of a heart's chord.

"Maude!" was the answering cry, and he was by her side.

Tenderly he placed his arm around her—how his blood tingled with the golden fire of youth—and he raised her from her kneeling posture. She made no resistance.

If he might not possess her love, he possessed her full confidence and faith; and she rested her head upon his breast, as she would have done upon that of a kind, sympathising father, and wept out the hard sorrow which lay so heavy upon her.

By-and-by, the tears began to flow less freely; the sobs became low and more subdued; and the interval between them increased. At length—

"Oh, this is very sore to bear," she murmured, in a faint tone.

Conolly's voice quivered as he spoke—

"Maude, *why* bear it?"

"I know not, I know not!" she cried wildly; "I cannot help myself."

"You mistake: it is Maude alone who can now help Maude."

His voice was full of earnestness. Maude clasped her arms upon her breast.

"What can I do? what can I do?" she cried again.

"Return home."

"I cannot—I cannot."

"Why not?"

"Do not ask me, do not ask, for I am quite, quite unable to give an answer; save that I love, I love. Therein lies all. I love; and, loving, I am beyond my own control. I cannot fly the danger even if I would. I am miserable."

"I know it, and in your misery is my agony."

Maude continued, in a despairing, helpless tone: "My reason tells me how much I err; but love, cruel love, has bound me, and will not let me go. I am as one upon a great precipice, standing upon the brink, and

gazing down into the dizzy abyss, until the brain reels, and is seized with a mad desire, a mad craving to jump down into the dark depths. I am upon the brink, and I am powerless, powerless ! There is but one hand to save me, and that hand is withdrawn from me. He will not stretch it forth ; and I feel, I feel that I must spring down the dark depths and be lost. Oh, I am so powerless, so helpless to save myself."

Again she hid her face on Conolly's breast.

He breathed hard. His right arm tightened nervously around her ; he raised his left, and pointed to the prostrate form of Brogden

"Maude," he said earnestly, "and it is for this—this less than man, this worse than demon that you will immolate yourself. Look at him now, as he lies there."

Maude shuddered, but she did not raise her head.

Conolly's voice gathered strength as he proceeded.

“Thus far, Maude, I have aided you, hoping that you will soon see enough to convince you of your folly, and cause you to turn your thoughts to wiser ends. You have seen much of this dark man’s character, but you have not seen all, and St. Patrick forbid that you ever should. But have you not seen enough—have you not already learned enough to turn your great heart from him? You have seen his hate, his revengeful spirit. He has struck you—you, Maude. Had it not been for your sake—I should have killed him at that moment. After this, can you still cling to him—do you still love him?”

“I cannot help myself—I cannot help myself,” she cried despairingly. “We women love but once; and then our love is all in all. And woe, woe is me! we, too, often love least where we should love most, and most where we should love least. I cannot help myself. All that I have seen, all that I have discovered—yea, a million times more than all this—is not

sufficient to quench the fire which is within me."

"For the holy saints' sake, Maude, do not be mad. For the sake of our sweet Virgin Mother, turn away from this man, who is—I cannot tell you; it would kill you."

"It might kill me, but it would not withdraw my heart. You need not tell me, for nothing is so bad, nothing is so foul, that my love will not find excuse for him. Oh, may heaven help me, for I am very weak."

Phelim Conolly groaned in agony. How could he move her now? He had tried her affections, her reason, her reverence, and all had failed—what should he do now?

There was one point yet unassailed. Pride.

"You are ready to find excuse for him, however black his crime—you are ready to forgive everything; but to what end?"

"I scarce know to what end," she answered, in that despairing tone.

"Maude, Maude," cried Conolly, passion-
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ately. "It is to no end, for no good—it will serve no purpose, for he does not, cannot love you. Where, where is your woman's pride? I tell you what human sentiment exists in him will never again be yours; he has given it to the fair Aileen O'Sullivan."

Maude started backward with a short, sharp, passionate cry—her face crimsoned, and somewhat of the old fire returned to the dark eyes. Conolly prayed that he might have touched her at last.

He had affected her, but in a very different manner from that which he had hoped.

Again her face blanched. She pressed one hand upon her breast, and stretched forth the other wrathfully. Her eyes gleamed with a deadly hate, and there was a depth of burning passion in her subdued voice.

"There, there," she said hotly, the outstretched hand quivering, "you have struck upon my curse—you have named the cause of all my misery."

"You are mad in blaming this poor girl for that man's crime. Turn your wrath from her, who has never done you aught of harm in act or thought—turn your wrath, I say, from the innocent, and lay it to the charge of the guilty."

"She's guilty."

"No, it is your mistaken passion which blinds you to the truth. She is as innocent of harm to you as I am. She abhors that man even as you should."

"Hush, hush!" cried Maude; "your words jar upon my soul."

"You must bear them, and I must speak, even if they should kill us both."

"They will kill me."

Conolly continued, and his words grew steadier, firmer, as he spoke.

"That man on whom you have wasted so much mad love, has been the blight of her young life. He has brought misery upon her great as your own. He has pursued her with the persistence of a fiend, revelling in the ruin which marked his

path. Stolen from her happy home—from the arms of the man she loved, and loves—her parents cruelly murdered——”

“By whom?”

“By——No, let that pass for the present. Sufficient that she was severed from all that was dear to her—sufficient that an innocent man bears the opprobrium, and may suffer the punishment due to the crime of another. Sufficient that the poor girl's life has been blighted; and that all this, and more, lies chargeable to that black villain, Brogden.”

“Enough.”

“After this, after all this, can you still cling to him? Can you still blame that poor suffering girl for the woe which has been brought upon you by the same hand which has worked the misery of so many others?”

Maude bent over the prostrate form of Brogden, as if to shield him from some blow.

“Coward,” she said fiercely, “you strike at a fallen man.”

“For your sake I would not harm him,” said Conolly, calmly.

“You desert him to whom you have pretended friendship in the hour of his need, and you would have me to follow your base example.”

“For your own sake.”

“No—because you hate him.”

“Have I cause to like him?”

She continued without heeding the interruption.

“Because your selfish heart is jealous of him. Because you would fain gratify yourself, and leave him to ruin. Because you would fain turn my heart from him and draw it to yourself.”

“You do me much injustice.”

“But you have failed—you have failed ; for you have given me strength to be true. Nothing of heaven or earth shall turn me from him now. I will cling to him—cling to him till the last.”

“And find his heart cold as the stone of this floor?”

"Still I will cling to him."

She knelt down again and hid her face upon the breast of the unconscious Brogden.

Conolly stood erect, his head raised, and an expression of wounded pride upon his face. It was long, long since Phelim Conolly had shown any symptoms of self-respect. But he had been maligned, his best actions misinterpreted—and by Maude Morgan, of all others.

He spoke in a calm, injured tone.

"You are unjust," he said; "unjust to yourself, to me, to every one. You have closed your eyes, and you cannot see the truth, because you will not. You have cast aside every thought, every sentiment, save this mad passion for him, and he is all unworthy."

His voice was sad, but there was a coldness in it which fell strangely upon Maude's ear. She remembered all that he had done for her; all that he had suffered for her; and conscience smote her for the unkind

words which in her rage she had used to him. She felt how much she was to blame for wounding that kind heart; and now that she was somewhat calm she felt sincerely sorry.

"Do not be angry, Phelim," she murmured, regretfully. "I was warm, and knew not what I said."

"I am not angry," said Conolly, quietly; "but you will at least understand me better when I tell you that for your sake I have rescued that man from the scaffold."

Maude started with a stifled scream, and a cold shudder passed over her.

"How?—how?" she inquired, almost choking.

"Listen," said Conolly, with solemnity. "You know the proctor, Jordan? He has obtained possession of some papers of Brogden's."

"I know—I know all that."

"Brogden made an attempt upon his life, and Jordan, in revenge, was proceeding to Kilkenny to denounce him. I was inter-

ested in this matter ; for there is one more crime to lay to this man's charge !”

Maude pressed her hands upon her head.

“I recollect—I recollect. I overheard the conversation between them.”

“Then you know that he has been living upon my property in ease, whilst I, St. Patrick knows, have had hard shifts for a living ? True, he has often lent me money—lent me my own. Oh, the pile of guilt that lies upon his soul is enough to drag a hundred men down to perdition.”

“But—but Jordan, the proctor—what have you done with him ?”

“Purchased his silence ; purchased it to save you pain—purchased it for that alone—by an order upon the estate.”

Maude rose to her feet, and quietly advanced to Conolly. She laid her hand softly upon his shoulder.

He leant his head upon his breast, as if, having vindicated himself from the wild charges made against him, he had nothing more to do but to return to his old self,

and bear his burden of pain as patiently as might be.

“Phelim Conolly, you are a brave man,” she said, softly, “and you have wounded me deeply.”

“Wounded you?”

“Ay, for I have done you much wrong now and in time past—much wrong in thought and deed. You have retaliated, and your blow has struck home. Believe me, Phelim, you have cut deeper into my heart with the kindness wherewith you have returned my wrong, than you could ever have done with knife or sword. Against them I would have fought—against your good heart I am powerless.”

“We will speak no more of this.”

“It will be better not. Let us probe the wounds as little as possible.”

And there was silence.

Maude sat down by the side of Brogden. Conolly sat a little apart, eyeing her askance.

She turned her eyes away from the pale,

sorrow-stricken face of Phelim Conolly. She could not bear to look at it, remembering how much of that sorrow was her work. She saw him now grieving—not for himself, but for her ; and she wished in her soul that she could give him relief in any other way than by renouncing her project of watching over her perfidious lover.

But there was no hope of that. So long as she was in peril he would be in torture. She must hope that time would work the change which she could not.

Conolly sat with his gloomy face gazing into the fire, and in his mind combating moody forebodings. What a change had passed over him ! All his rough, jovial humour was gone, save at times when he put it on to mask deeper emotions. His face, which had been somewhat florid and debauched in appearance, was now pale and thoughtful. Even the potheen was forgotten in the revolution which had taken place.

At last he rose hastily and walked from the apartment. He felt the necessity of fresh air. In this stony chamber he felt just then as if he would choke. He must out into the cool night, and let the wind fan his heated cheeks. He must out, or he was certain he would make a fool of himself.

Maude sat by the still insensible Brogden, keeping faithful watch.

She too was changed. She did not weep now ; there was no more sobbing—no more convulsive heaving of the body.

The words of Phelim Conolly, with the terrible something which he had left unsaid, had sunk deep into her heart. Her passion had, at the time, driven away the import of his words. But now, sitting there by that senseless body, absorbed in thought, the words came back to her with double force. She shuddered as she looked upon the form stretched out upon the ground before her ; shuddered to think of the evil which he had done—of the evil which he was pre-

pared to do—shuddered, as for a moment the End flashed before her.

Her face assumed the expression of the feeling within her heart—that of blank despair.

CHAPTER IX.

WORDS SHARPER THAN KNIVES.

Thus many an evening on the shore
Sat Cormac, raving wild and lowly ;
Still idly muttering o'er and o'er,
'She lives, detained by spells unholy.'
T. Crofton Croker.

DEATH had stretched out his skeleton fingers and plucked at Maurice O'More. He had been upon the very verge of life ; nay, he had been for some time lost to this world in a death-like trance.

Then there had been a great commotion in the house, and the word had gone forth that the young master was dead. The doctor shook his head, the priest prayed, and the household wailed for the departed.

Then the doctor had made a long and important examination of the patient, and informed the sorrow-stricken father that

the son yet lived and might be restored to life. So they watched by the bed all through the night, and the priest and the father prayed for the life which was so nigh unto death.

As the morning first began faintly to dawn upon that pale face—first, a gentle flush; then a tremor of the lips; and then quick, short breathing. The crisis was past.

Brogden soon heard of this marvellous restoration. He cursed his ill-luck, and waited the issue of events.

The doctor now pronounced Maurice to be in a fair way to recover, for the fever would soon abate, and the wound upon the head was quite harmless, provided the attendant fever could be successfully combated.

Myles O'More grasped the hands of doctor and priest; and, with much moisture in his old eyes, gave them both thanks. He gave each credit for a share in the restoration of his son, and both were pleased.

The household recovered from its despair, and joy took the place of grief. Tony had been kneeling devoutly at the foot of the bed with his head hid in the curtain, so that none might see the warm tears which sprang up from his honest heart. Tony was at no time really a coward; when there was palpable danger to meet, none could face it with a stouter heart. But here, in this silent chamber, with death so near—so near that he could almost feel it—he trembled, and muttered prayers for his luckless foster-brother. None ever knew how gladly Tony would have changed places with the sick man.

Then came to Maurice the weary awakening, as it seemed, from a long, painful dream. Slowly gathering up his lost strength, he lay upon the bed in that little chamber, with his mind in a confusion.

Days and days he lay there, unable to fix his thoughts upon anything. His eyes would wander restlessly about the apart-

ment, watching the movements of the few flies which yet lingered with the autumn.

Days and days again went by, and his thoughts recovered somewhat of consistency. He remembered that night at Kitty Mullins's; the strange apparition of the Boccagh; the pursuit, the rock, and his fall.

Then he grew restless, yearning for strength to resume the search for his beloved; to seek again the villain who had wrought upon him all this misery—who had so nearly been the cause of his death.

Tony watched by his side night and day. He would scarcely leave the chamber. He could not be made to rest in any other part of the house. Lovingly, faithfully did he keep watch, with more of the tenderness of a woman than of a rough, hard-handed man.

With what joy did he observe the slowly returning sense—the slow renewal of strength! He could have danced round the room for very gladness of heart.

"Tony," murmured the sick man, faintly.

"Yes, Maurice, darling."

"Have I been long ill?"

"A good bit."

"How long?"

"Faith, I scarcely know; many weeks now, though. Don't ye see that it's almost dead winter?"

"Is it?"

"Yes."

"And have you—have you heard nothing of *her*?"

"Sorry the word—barring that Mr. Brogden has sent down asking after ye; and the boy that brings the message always tells us that his master is keeping the chase hot after that ugly spalpeen that's been the ruin of us all."

"And have they not found him yet?"

"Is it find the Boccagh. Maurice, agra, don't be after troubling yourself about him just now; it'll prevent ye from getting well. But I can tell ye that they'll never lay hands upon the child of the thigas."

Maurice groaned.

"Don't, don't, Maurice," cried Tony, sorrowfully. "Brogden's boy says that they think they will soon find out where he has hid the poor girl, though they mayn't find him. And sure it's the girl we want, after all."

"Oh, for a little strength," moaned Maurice.

"Don't be after making yourself uneasy now, or you'll be all the longer before you get your strength. Now don't speak another word."

And so Maurice lay silently yearning for his lost health, but with very little hope now in his heart.

His craving now was for revenge. He could scarcely hope that he would find his love.

Things were in this state when there suddenly occurred to Mr. Benjamin Brogden the novel idea of paying a visit of condolence to Maurice O'More. Booted and spurred, the bold Squire mounted his

mare one fine morning and rode up to the farm.

As he rode along in the teeth of a keen, strong winter wind, he arranged in his own mind the tone in which he would address the invalid. A black suggestion flashed upon his brain, and he gave a chuckle of joy.

On reaching the farm, he learned that Maurice was in the kitchen, and thither he hastened. Softly entering the place, he found the object of his search seated alone before the blazing hearth. The head of Maurice was wrapt up in a white bandage, and his face was still deathly pale. His eyes were bright and burning, indicative of deep mental anxiety. He was thin and nervous.

A thrill of something akin to pity ran through Brogden's heart as Maurice, hearing the footsteps, looked up with a faint smile of welcome.

Resuming a look of intense sympathy, Brogden took the thin hand, on which the blue veins were swelling warmly. With an

assumption of blunt kindness and frankness he expressed his regret for the accident which had so nearly proved fatal. Then easily led Maurice, whose whole thoughts were occupied with the subject, to converse about the Boccagh and Aileen. Brogden hinted darkly at something he had heard, and then, with pretended awkwardness, attempted to evade the question. Of course that only quickened the anxiety of the invalid, and he insisted upon knowing all.

Brogden played his game skilfully; he hesitated, made many excuses, and frankly confessed that he would rather avoid the subject. Maurice insisted the more doggedly as his agitation increased; and at last, as if compelled to speak against his will, the traitor proceeded—

“Doesn't it strike you as rather strange that Aileen should be away all this time, and never send any message? I know that you will say that she has had no means; that she has been kept a close prisoner. But still, do you not think she might have

found *some* mode of communication with you, or some one?"

Maurice started, but he spoke no word.

"You have forced me to this, remember," Brogden continued; "you have brought it upon yourself; and nothing but my friendship for you would make me speak the words which are to follow."

The lips of Maurice moved, but no words came. He dreaded what was coming.

"Then," Brogden went on, hesitating more and more, "I am convinced that Aileen O'Sullivan might have communicated with you, perhaps escaped to you, had she desired. I am convinced that she is no prisoner."

Again Maurice started, and his lips moved but no sound came. His broad chest heaved and fell; the blue veins upon his temples throbbed and throbbed as if they would burst, but he was speechless.

Brogden continued; now in a hurried, excited manner.

"Now, O'More, for the sake of every-

thing holy, control yourself. You must bear it now—you have forced it from me, remember, and you must hear it all, though it wring my soul to tell it you."

Maurice gasped.

"I say I don't believe that she is a prisoner," Brogden went on, apparently becoming more excited as he proceeded. "I don't believe it, I say; the people about the parish don't believe it. I don't speak upon the rumour only——Dash it! let it out at once, since you must know it sooner or later, and the sooner, the better for you. I *know* that she is not a prisoner—I *know* that Ailleen O'Sullivan is with the accursed Boccagh of her own free will."

"Liar!"

It was a wild, heart-rending, discordant shriek; and with it Maurice sprang to his feet, as if he would strike the foul traducer down.

At the same moment Brogden stood upon his guard.

But that was unnecessary.

The sudden burst of energy which had roused the sick man, endowing him, as it seemed for the moment, with a giant's strength, as suddenly deserted him, leaving him twenty-fold more weak and helpless than he had been before.

The face of Maurice, which, at the mention of the absent Aileen's shame, had flushed to burning crimson, now blanched. The hand which had been upraised as with strength to strike down an ox, dropped powerless to his side. A clammy moisture gathered upon his brow; and, with a strange, cold shudder, and a deep groan of pain, he sank, helpless, hopeless, insensible, back upon his chair.

Brogden eyed him with an expression of commiseration. Both now remained long silent; and only the hard, quick breathing of Maurice was heard in the apartment.

At length Brogden spoke.

"I told you what it would be," he said, in an injured tone. "I told you not to ask me—I begged of you to let me alone; but

you would not hear reason—you would persist in having the whole story; and, now you've got it, what can you make of it?"

"It is false, false, false," cried Maurice, wildly, with another spasmodic ebullition of strength.

"Well, I hope it is, for your sake," Brogden said, doubtfully.

"I tell you it *is* false—false as heaven is true," Maurice went on, with fierce, gleaming eyes. "It is a lie, a lie—a foul, base, fiendish lie; and may our holy Church cast into perdition him who first gave it breath. May the tongue of him who repeats it cleave dumbly to his mouth."

There was something awing in the passion of that man, with his white face, clammy as it seemed with the dews of death.

Brogden switched his boot, and cast his eyes downward uneasily.

"Is it possible that, in your senses, your mind can suggest so black an idea as that she would stay with him, the murderer of her parents? Remember that—remember

that!—the murderer of her parents! Would she stay with him, if she were not bound by the villain's power?"

Brogden's brow darkened.

"Does she know," he muttered, gloomily, "that he is the—the assassin?"

Maurice was mute. A cold shudder passed over his weak frame, and he clutched the chair upon which he sat for support. His eyes stared blankly at his companion.

His spirit instinctively recoiled from the man, who, like a fiend bent upon his destruction, met him at every turn with one suggestion fouler, blacker than its fore-runner.

The barb struck deep, deeper even than the darkest mind, desiring to wound, could have calculated. It cast down into the dust the strongest argument in Aileen's favour.

Once before had the thought of her remaining with the Boccagh of her own will appeared before his mind's eye—appeared as a possibility, and had been

instantly banished as treason to all that was true and noble. But now, when that thought found utterance in another—nay, found utterance, as he was told, in many others—it came upon him with somewhat more force than the appearance of a mere possibility.

It was no longer a shadow. It took shape and probability. It presented itself with reason and argument to support it.

Maurice well knew that the Boccagh had loved Aileen passionately. True, his body was deformed, but he was not ugly. There was a species of wild beauty about him, in his strongly marked but proportioned features, surrounded with that great beard and whiskers. His eyes, too, had the power of assuming at times a strange pathos, which stirred up pity in the hearts of those who looked upon him.

All this Maurice knew, and he trembled. She, alone, unprotected, with him, listening daily to his sad complaints, and daily witnessing his misery—might she not, in very pity

for him, being ignorant of his guilt, yield to him ; but Aileen loved him (Maurice), and she would be true in fate's despite.

"Your words bear semblance of possibility," he murmured, very faintly, very weakly ; "but you forget that her heart was given wholly to me, and she would not stay from me willingly whilst I lived."

"Ay," muttered Brogden, in the same gloomy tone as before ; "but you forget that you were reported dead?"

"Reported dead?"

"Ay, it was through the whole parish."

Maurice sank back with a heavy groan. The last blow had been struck, the last hope had been shattered.

Brogden waited a long time, expecting him to speak ; but he did not move. He was about to leave when Maurice faintly called him back.

"I—I don't want you to go away with a wrong impression."

"About what?"

"I wish you to understand that, in spite

of all, I believe that she is true. That, in my soul, I am convinced of it."

"Very well."

"And, in the name of friendship, I desire you never to mention this topic again—never to let the faintest breath of a suspicion of her cross your lips."

"If you desire 'it, it never shall."

"Many thanks. And now, farewell."

"Good-bye ; keep up your spirits."

And as Maurice sank back in his chair, exhausted, Brogden took his departure.

As he rode out at the gate of the farm-yard, a crafty, grim smile of satisfaction passed over his sallow countenance. And as he rode smartly away from the house, an ugly scowl darkened the features of Tony Flanagan, who was looking after him.

Tony hated Brogden heartily. First, because he had induced his foster-brother to become a Rathboy ; and, next, because it was upon his advice that Maurice had sent him and the others home on the night of the accident. Tony was convinced that,

had he been there, the injury would never have been done.

"Bedad," he said to himself, shaking his head after the retiring form of Brogden—"bedad, my fine Squire, ye were never a great favourite of mine, and it's less ye are now than ever!"

"What ails ye now, Tony, that ye go on muttering bloody murder to yourself in that way?"

Tony turned round. The scowl instantly cleared away from his face, for he was looking at pretty little Bridget.

"Faith, I don't know what ails me Bridget, darling!"

"Don't ye?"

"No; but I'm thinking that ye might be able to tell me."

"How should I know what it is that troubles ye?"

Tony took off his hat and scratched his head, which actions declared that he had something awkward to say.

"Because, Bridget, darling—because,

because—och, murder, how them eyes of yours bother me!”

“Is that what troubles ye?”

“That’s part of it.”

“And what’s the rest?”

“Well; then, the rest is your own sweet self, Bridget, honey!”

“Ah, go along with ye!”

And with a coquettish toss of her pretty little head, Bridget turned away to her dairy.

For a few moments Tony stared after her; then he turned round and saw Brogden fast disappearing.

Tony moved towards the kitchen.

That grim satisfaction which had expressed itself upon the features of Brogden as he rode out of the farmyard, increased with the distance from the farm. He was evidently highly gratified with the proceedings.

He gave the horse a smart switch, and at the same moment gave vent to a short, sneering laugh.

"There is not much likelihood of his living after that fillip," he muttered; "and if he does recover he will only get his head broken again. Should that fail—humph. In that case I must adhere to my first determination, and make use of Houghton. Ha, ha, things go well with me at last."

And he rode gaily on.

When Tony entered the kitchen he was astonished to perceive that Maurice was asleep. He approached him, and found that he was insensible.

CHAPTER X.

THE TOKEN.

The dew, the blossom on the tree,
With charms inconstant shine ;
Their charms were his, but woe to me,
Their constancy was mine.

Goldsmith.

THE reaction was severe. Again days and days did he lie, trembling, as it were, between life and death.

And now the white snow began to wrap the earth in her fair white mantle, and the snow was rivalled by the whiteness upon the face of Maurice O'More.

He had been sorely tried, mentally and physically. But youth and a sound constitution stood him in good stead, and he rallied. Slowly, very slowly, did he approach convalescence, and glad were the hearts of all the members of that house-

hold when he was once more able to crawl from his bedroom to the kitchen.

Then, leaning heavily upon Tony's arm, he began to walk out into the yard; and, after a little, he extended his walk. Daily he wandered down the green lanes of the farm; and at length he was able to walk without the assistance of his warm-hearted foster-brother.

Down the green lane the two stepped now, with the crisp snow crackling beneath their feet. Maurice leant upon a heavy stick, but he was almost well again. The length of his walks had been much increased of late, and the keen wind imparted somewhat of a healthy glow to his cheek.

But there was a strange blackness in his expression. His eyes seemed to look forward upon an utter void; the heart seemed to express through them a deep despairing hopelessness.

The poison had worked, and was working, within him, withering the very roots of life. He would not believe Aileen was false, but

yet he doubted, and the doubt made sad havoc with him.

He walked silently by the side of his foster-brother. His thoughts were still somewhat confused, still jumped from one subject to another. They were close to the highway. Presently Tony, with immense disgust, discovered a wicked cow which had strayed from its proper field.

"Bad cess to the beast!" cried Tony, as he rushed wildly after the erring animal, in order to drive it back to the field.

Maurice, leaning upon his stick, stood watching the chase. Suddenly he felt a tap upon the arm. He turned, and beheld a mendicant with a wooden stump from the knee of one of the legs.

"Good luck to your honour!" cried the man, "and long life to ye!"

"Thank you; here is the return for your good wish."

And Maurice dropped some silver into the man's outstretched palm.

"Oh, then, more power to your honour

that gives without the asking! May ye ever have plenty to give, and may all the saints look down and bless ye for the sweet comfort that ye have been after giving to a poor old man!"

"Thank you again: now leave me."

"Whisht!"

The man looked cautiously round, as if to see that no one observed him.

"Whisper! I've got news for ye."

"News for me!" cried Maurice, excitedly.

"Yes."

"From whom?"

"Who do ye think, now?"

"Don't propose riddles, but tell what your news is at once."

"Very well, then, it's a message."

"To the effect——"

"That ye are to be in the Glen of Ballybar this night at eleven o'clock."

Maurice stared at the man.

"The Glen of Ballybar!" he exclaimed.

"For what purpose am I to be there?"

"To meet somebody."

"Who—who?"

"Ailleen O'Sullivan."

Maurice savagely clutched the man by the collar.

"Hallo! what is it ye're after now?"

"How do you bring a message from her?"

"I got it from a little old man, that said he once met ye near the Delaneys' farm, over beyond Lough Bragh, there. And ye were to be sure to go to the glen to-night, no matter what sort of weather it is."

"Ay."

"And ye were sure to be alone."

"Alone?"

"Yes, that is, nobody was to be with ye."

Maurice reflected.

"How do I know that this is not some trick."

"Oh, bedad, I nearly forgot that!"

The man began to shuffle the contents of his capacious wallet, and finally drew forth a small paper packet. Maurice eagerly snatched it.

“What is this?”

“That’s more than I know. But stop a bit before ye open it. I was to say that she that sends that, prays that ye will be at the place named, at the hour, and alone.”

“The old man told you this?”

“Yes, and the blessings of the saints attend your honour!”

Maurice stood in a quandary with the packet in his hand, whilst the messenger moved quietly away.

Tony rejoined his foster-brother. There were signs of agitation upon his good-natured face.

“Bad luck to that beast—what’s that ye’ve got, Maurice?”

“This? Oh nothing.”

Maurice hastily shoved the packet into his pocket.

Tony began to whistle, and they walked home.

Maurice was perplexed. The message which he had received seemed so vague.

He was impatient to reach home, that he might examine the packet.

At length he was in his own room, the door shut and bolted. He opened the packet and found the miniature he had given to Aileen.

His heart beat violently. The blood coursed madly through his veins, and a strange vigour was instilled in his body. Pain, sickness, sorrow, all were forgotten, for the erewhile faint life within him was quickened by hope.

He gazed upon the miniature—the token from his love—like one enchanted. His eyes were fixed upon it, and he could not have withdrawn them even if he had so desired. It was the palpable assurance of her truth—the palpable assurance that she still loved. She was truth itself, and here was the token. There could be no doubt now but that the messenger was from her.

Well he remembered the morning upon which he had given her this miniature. It was the morning upon which she had

promised to become his wife; and, horrible, it was the morning previous to that fatal night when her parents had been destroyed.

The Glen of Ballybar—and alone.

“Why alone?”

Pshaw. What silly objection was he about to make? Enough that Aileen had at length found means of communicating with him. She was calling upon him for help, and though the foul fiend himself stood between them he would obey her. Despite of all he would rescue her.

CHAPTER XI.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

And black and bloody the revenge,
For this dark midnight's sake,
The kindred of my murder'd friend
On thine and thee will take.

Samuel Ferguson.

THE waves dashed with a moaning sound upon the beach. The dark shadow of night seemed darker in the precincts of Lough Bragh—majestic in its solitude and gloom.

Dark the night, but darker, fiercer the thoughts of the man who rode slowly along the lough's black marge.

The horse upon which he rode moved slowly. The rider seemed to allow it to move at its own will; he seemed to be too much occupied with his own dark reflections to give heed to the animal.

Ever restless, ever moving about like an unquiet spirit, Brogden sat upon his horse in wrath, for he had been again disappointed at the mountain hut.

“A thousand curses upon his ugly head,” he muttered angrily. “I must take other measures to find him. He has some means of jilting me in that infernal cabin; but he shall not do it long. Ay, even if I lose the girl I’ll find him. He will be sorry then that he did not come to terms when he had to deal with me alone—Dash it, how the wind rages.”

He heard the constant splashing of the waters. The wind swept round him sharply.

“I wonder what that dashed proctor is up to. He is at some deep game, or he would never be so quiet. Fiends take them all—my life is becoming tortured.”

Slowly the horse moved on, round by the dark lough.

Suddenly the animal gave a quick jerk with its head and stood still.

"Hold." It was a firm, commanding voice.

Brogden, as he gave vent to a shout of surprise, drew his ever-ready pistol.

"Don't be alarmed," said the voice sneeringly.

"What the dash do you want?"

"Nay, that is my question."

"Who are you?"

"Cormac."

With a loud shout of triumph Brogden sprang from his horse and laid hold of the Boccagh.

"Caught at last," cried Brogden, fiercely. "You have given me a good deal of trouble, but I have you now, safe and sound, by the powers."

Cormac laughed a low, derisive laugh.

"You may laugh," Brogden went on furiously; "but you have such a nack of slipping through people's fingers that I can scarcely be sure of you unless I see you and have my hand upon you."

"Well, there is no need to have your

hand upon me. See me you may. I have some sticks here, and as it is cold and dark we may as well have a fire."

"What, and bring a body of the red-coats upon us?"

"Well, you are not afraid, are you?"

"No, but you have some need to be."

The Boccagh laughed.

"I can take care of myself."

"Yes, but they might think it strange to find me here with a fire. They might suspect it as a signal."

"True; but you may be perfectly at ease; the mist is too dense for a fire to be seen from a distance of twenty yards even."

"Very well; light it and be quick. It's cold and cursedly dark. I like to have light. Darkness makes me moody."

Whilst Brogden was speaking Cormac struck a light by means of a tinder box and set fire to some dry wood which he had evidently had ready for the purpose.

A lurid glare sprang quickly up, illuming the dark figures of the two men and a

small space around. As Cormac had said, the mist was too dense for the light to spread far ; but the red blaze was sufficient to give the scene a weird, unearthly aspect.

Brogden stood leaning upon the neck of his horse, and the animal snorted and shook as if in fear. The Boccagh, with his arms folded upon his breast, a long black cloak hanging carelessly about him, and his broad-brimmed hat casting a deep shadow over his strange features, leaned his back against a dark rock which rose behind him.

When the light first burst forth Brogden had discovered that they were upon a rocky ledge which overhung the lough, and the reflex of the light upon the waters seemed like blood. He hastily turned away his eyes from it.

"Well?" he said interrogatively, as if desirous of breaking the silence which had stolen over them.

"Well," repeated Cormac. "You wanted me ; and I am here."

"Humph. Then, in the first place, you have broken faith with me."

"No. You were the first to do that."

"How so?"

"Why, upon the first night that we were to have been together—you remember the night; the one upon which——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Brogden, hastily, "I remember."

"That's well. You will also remember that you took the start of me, and did all the work yourself."

"You were behind the time."

"Wrong. I was before it."

"No matter. I still desired to keep the agreement."

Cormac laughed bitterly.

"You mean that you still desired that I should take the punishment of your guilt. Ha, ha!"

Brogden started.

"My guilt. There is none——"

"Faugh. Throw off your mask here.

It is useless. I see you as plain as light whether you be masked or not."

Brogden's brow darkened.

"Chut, chut. What need of all this false pretence?"

"Pretence. By the powers it is no pretence. It is well enough known that you settled with the old people. I did not see them upon that night."

Again that bitter laugh.

"True, it is believed that my hand struck the blow——"

"And it did—it did," Brogden broke in excitedly.

"It is false, and you know it is; but, for your own safety, you would have me bear the stigma."

"It cannot affect me whether you or any one else bears it."

Cormac stretched out his hand towards his companion menacingly.

"Benjamin Brogden, beware," he said in a deep toned voice, which seemed to ring out from the rocks.

The echoes of the shore ran jubilantly along, crying "Beware—beware."

Brogden's lip twitched nervously.

"Dash it, don't shout out in that way," he muttered in a surly voice.

Cormac continued in the same manner as before.

"This guilt has hung over me like an evil power; it shadows my life, darkens every hope of happiness; it has branded me throughout the land as a foul curse, a black thing, to be destroyed as they would some ravenous wolf. But beware, for I will bear it no longer."

Brogden's thin lip curled contemptuously. He touched the faggots of the fire with his foot. He did not look towards his companion.

"You mean," he said, in a low, sneering tone—"you mean that you will accuse me?"

"Perhaps."

"Ha, ha! And pray who do you think would believe you?"

"You may learn to your cost."

"Bah, man," Brogden said, fiercely; "before you could utter half-a-dozen words—before you could raise your finger to point out the guilty, you would be torn piecemeal—trampled under foot. I tell you that you have but to show yourself to be crushed to death."

"I know all this; I have known it long. The curse clings to me and drags me downward."

"Then don't be fool enough to make me turn against you. I desire that we should be friends—at least come to amicable terms."

"To the effect——"

"That neither of us in any way harm the other."

"And the conditions?"

"You give up the girl and I will find means to get you out of the country."

Cormac laughed loudly, derisively. Again the echoes were stirred from their rest, and rung along the shore as if a hun-

dred demons were triumphing over some poor victim.

"Will you stop that noise?" growled Brogden, uneasily. "You frighten the horse. Quiet, you brute."

The horse had reared up and attempted to back away from the place. Brogden checked the animal, uttering many curses upon it.

"You offer wonderfully fair terms," Cormac said, sarcastically, "but you must learn that it is I alone who have the power to make terms and claim conditions. For I have now a heart to pity me, to sympathise with me; a tongue to declare the wrong that has been done; a tongue that Justice self will listen to with respect; a kind hand to rise up in my defence against my false accusers."

"And pray where have you found all this?" Brogden sneered.

"In one whose pure breast owns not one evil thought. One who knows you, and abhors you—Ailleen O'Sullivan."

Brogden's fingers closed with spasmodic tightness upon the heavy handle of his whip, his lips quivered nervously, and for a few moments he stood speechless.

At length he spoke in a hushed, choking voice.

"You have told her?"

"I have."

"And she believes you?"

"She believes me."

Brogden leant heavily upon the neck of his horse. His disengaged arm hung nerveless by his side; his head drooped forward and he stood utterly unmanned.

The great passion of his dark soul was shattered; his plots, his schemes, his hopes were blasted and scattered to the wind. The woman for whom he had rushed deeper into sin than he had ever deemed possible—the woman for whom he had risked life, reputation—the woman for whom he had done all this, for whom he was ready to do it all over again—could

never, never be his. The fiat had gone forth. Fate was against him.

For the moment he was helpless ; for the moment his evil genius deserted him. Black as might be his nature, his passion for the fair Aileen had been sincere. The knowledge of the utter failure of his efforts to gain her struck him down as with a sledge-hammer.

For the moment, life seemed worthless. But a cold shudder passed over him, as a sombre vision rose before him—the gallows.

But with that dreadful shadow his evil genius returned, and a burning desire for revenge took possession of his soul. He would retaliate, he would strike back—against the world, even against her whose loveliness had been his destruction. Fierce, dark thoughts rushed through his mind, and he raised his head, with a malignant fiend sparkling in his eyes.

Cormac stood silently watching him, with a bitter smile upon his face.

Brogden spoke hoarsely.

"You have done well; but mark me, you have sounded your own knell and hers."

"Mine, it may be—not hers."

"And hers, I say," Brogden said, fiercely. "Since she has learned how much she has cursed my life, she must make expiation for the ruin she has wrought. And, by the powers above, I will never rest until I have seen her in her winding-sheet."

The Boccagh started. A fierce retort was rising to his lips, but he suppressed it.

"I bear a message to you," he said, slowly, "from Ailleen."

"Well?"

Cormac's voice seemed to tremble slightly as he began.

"She knows your guilt, and out of her own misery she can yet pity you. She will not seek to harm you, for that will not quicken the dead. But she prays you—she beseeches you to leave the country at once. She implores you to fly to some far off land where you and your crime will be unknown, where you may learn to repent."

Brogden laughed, fiercely.

"But if you remain in this country," Cormac went on, in a firmer voice, "if you still stand before her, reminding her of the past, she will have no alternative but to proclaim your guilt, and seek the vengeance which is due to justice."

"Bah! I am not the man to stop half-way because danger shows his teeth. No; I have gone thus far, and I will stand the issue."

"And that issue is certain death."

Brogden started; the voice was so low, so solemn, and so earnest. He gave a contemptuous laugh.

"We shall see," he said; "the end is yet to come."

"But that end is fixed as fate."

"Perhaps; but a pretty woman might even tempt Fate to hesitate. If she is obstinate, she is immortal—I have gone too far to turn back."

The Boccagh gave a convulsive start. Then he laughed, low and bitterly.

"Are you not satisfied with the evil you have done?" he asked, quietly.

"She is to blame for all—she will be to blame for this. She has the alternative of marrying me or death."

"Maurice O'More still lives."

"What of that?"

"Were everything else undone, that would be more than enough to make her die rather than accept you as her husband. More, if you refuse to fly the country before sunrise, Maurice O'More shall know the truth."

A strange shudder passed over Brogden. In a moment he spoke calmly, firmly—

"Before sunrise, Maurice O'More will have need of all his influence to save his own life."

"Even then you can never possess her."

"Who shall stay me?"

"I—for I have sworn that whilst one drop of life-blood was warm in my heart, I would protect Aileen O'Sullivan from your black passion."

"Then you have been tricking me from the first."

"I am her protector."

"Then," cried Brogden, fiercely, "your protection ends here."

Quick as thought he fired a pistol at the Boccagh, but the ball rebounded harmlessly from the rock.

Cormac sprang forward, his eyes glaring wildly. Brogden dashed the pistol in his face, and the red blood burst forth in a jet.

At the same moment Brogden raised his heavy riding-whip, and brought down the butt-end with terrific force. Cormac parried the blow with his left arm, and the whip broke in two.

With a fierce yell of rage, Brogden sprang upon his opponent, clutching him by the throat; but at the same time his own neck was surrounded by the long, deathly-cold fingers of the Boccagh.

The red fire glittered in a ghastly shape upon the dark waters, and the waves beat upon the rocks moaning. The

horse neighed and shook as with fear ; and the wind swept along with shrill shrieks. The two men breathed hard and hotly.

Brogden's tall figure was slightly bent ; he was strong, fired by heat, and thirsting for revenge.

Cormac's long arms almost entirely counterbalanced the advantage which his assailant possessed in stature. He was also strong, fired by love, and also thirsting for revenge.

It was a struggle for dear life.

They bent backwards and forwards, to this side and that. They twisted and twirled round and round into the fire. The burning brands were scattered in all directions.

Round and round, backwards and forwards, they whirled and bent ; and every movement brought them nearer, nearer to a danger which threatened destruction to both, and which neither appeared to have observed—the precipice overhanging the Lough.

They had been standing upon the ledge. Brogden had observed this, but had forgotten in his wrath.

Still, like two excited demons, they struggled—each for the other's life. Still they struggled, and still they neared the brink of the abyss.

In swinging round, Brogden's foot struck one of the brands which had been kicked from the fire. It was still at red heat; and the blow from Brogden's foot hurled it over the rocks into the dark waters—hissing, seething.

It seemed as a warning—for the combatants now noted their danger, but neither appeared to take heed.

Brogden's eye brightened—the struggle would soon end.

Putting forth his whole strength into one last grand effort, Brogden raised Cormac from the ground, and with gigantic power hurled him away towards the brink of the abyss.

There was a rush of wind, a heavy

rumbling sound, a great splash in the dark waters—then silence.

Brogden stood, one foot advanced, his body bent forward, listening intently—still silence.

Another rush of wind, and a moaning sweep of the waves.

Echoing fearfully along the rocky shore—rising up from the dark waters, and seeming to mingle with their strange murmurs, came a wild, terrible laugh, ringing out upon the night with horrible distinctness.

Brogden shuddered as he listened; that laugh recalled fearful memories.

Another rush of wind; and Brogden felt as if some one had flitted hurriedly past him.

He wheeled round and made a run. He stumbled against his horse, which stood shivering as with the ague.

“A thousand curses,” he muttered, in a hollow voice; “I feel as though the fiend himself were clutching at me.”

He mounted the horse, and, doubling up the reins, beat the animal sharply upon the neck. The horse, still shaking, bounded forward, as if anxious to get away from that dreadful spot.

Man and beast were troubled with strange fears.

Brogden quivered as he thought of all that he had learned that night, and his blood burned with passion. He thought that he had destroyed the hated Boccagh and yet he doubted. That laugh, that fiendish laugh ; it haunted him with dark misgivings.

Passing through the village of Rathlin, he drew the rein, and made the horse walk. The village was quiet ; the inhabitants appeared to have retired for the night.

Brogden saw the true cause of this stillness, when he discovered two red-coated sentinels pacing before the door of the largest thatched cottage in the village. Brogden was challenged by the sentinels ; he readily satisfied them, and passed on.

He was nervous and disturbed. Ever and anon he gazed around, as if fearful of some hidden enemy attacking him unperceived.

Rathlin was about a mile behind him, when, peering through the dim light, he descried the figure of a man walking before him.

He soon came up with the pedestrian; the man raised his head, and Brogden started in amaze, checking his horse at the same time.

"Brogden," exclaimed the man.

"O'More," ejaculated Brogden.

Maurice seemed to be annoyed by this meeting, and Brogden appeared to be agreeably astonished, in despite of his strange nervousness and agitation.

"I had no idea of meeting you," said Maurice.

"I much less expected to see you here," said Brogden, huskily. "But give me your hand."

They shook hands.

"How is it that you have so suddenly regained strength?" Brogden added.

"Oh, I have been recovering rapidly," Maurice answered, uneasily.

"Anxious to be on the chase again—eh?"

"Yes, yes! that's it."

Brogden cast a quick glance of suspicion upon him.

"But you have not been walking all this distance?"

"No; I was riding, but I left my horse at Rathlin."

"Why did you do that?"

"Well, I could not take it with me."

"Humph! Where are you going?"

"Oh, nowhere—nowhere."

"That's a strange place to travel all this distance to find," said Brogden, dryly.

Maurice laughed good-naturedly.

"Well," he said; "I don't see why I should hide it from you. I want to pass through the Glen of Ballybar."

"I suppose I am not to ask for what purpose?" he said at length.

"No," returned Maurice; "you had better not ask, because I would rather not tell."

"You will be returning by Rathlin?" Brogden said, abruptly.

"I must return that way in order to get my horse."

Brogden fidgeted with the reins of his horse. There was a strange nervous agitation in his manner—a peculiar sharp huskiness in his voice. But Maurice was too much occupied with his own thoughts to notice the change in his companion, whom he was desirous of parting with as soon as possible.

They came to an old cross-bar gate. Here Maurice stopped, and Brogden pulled up his horse.

"Well," said Maurice, "I mean to strike across the bog; it will save me a couple of miles."

"Right, right," said Brogden, in a quick, jerking tone.

“Good-bye, then.”

Maurice began to climb the gate. He had got one leg over it, and was sitting astride.

“Stay,” said Brogden, huskily.

Maurice paused in the position which he had just gained.

“What now?” he asked.

“As I will not see you to-night again, and may not see you for several days, I had better give you some information which it will be necessary for you to know.”

“What is it?”

Brogden peered cautiously around, and lowered his voice to a whisper.

“You remember the talk of the general rising of the patriots?”

“I remember.”

“Good. Then it is to take place in three or four days; the precise day will be made known to us upon the night preceding. But we must all be prepared for that intimation; we must be all ready to act as one man. You understand?”

"I think so."

"Good. Then you must know what to do—how to act with your men as lieutenant of the Rathboys, of course."

"Oh, I had forgotten."

"You have a short memory," said Brogden with a dry laugh.

"Sometimes; but you have forgotten that I am not yet a Rathboy. I did not take the oath."

"Bah, you have been sufficiently initiated for that to pass."

"But perhaps I would rather not join now."

"Nonsense. What, you will never turn tail because danger shows itself?"

The shaft struck home: it pierced the man's pride of honour, and his courage.

"Very well. What am I to do?" he inquired.

"You shall see."

Brogden took off his hat, and, with fingers which trembled unaccountably, abstracted from beneath the lining several

carefully folded papers. Maurice eyed these movements impatiently.

"What are these?" he enquired, when he saw the documents.

"These are your instructions," said Brogden, in that low tone which he had adopted.

Maurice held up his hand and took the papers.

"Anything more?"

Brogden bent forward.

"Hide them at once. When you get home, read them attentively. Impress every word upon your mind, and then—*burn them.*"

"Very well."

"Be very careful."

"All right."

Maurice threw his leg over the gate, and jumped to the ground upon the other side. He waved his hand to Brogden, and hurried away across the field.

Brogden remained peering through the dim light after the fast-retiring figure. He

drew a long heavy breath. His lips quivered.

"It's done." He took his handkerchief, and wiped the cold, clammy perspiration from his brow. "Pshaw. What the dash is the matter with me? It's cursedly cold. My tussle with that imp of darkness has unnerved me."

He dug his heels into his horse's ribs, and, wheeling round, rode back towards Rathlin.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GLEN OF BALLYBAR.

O how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day ;
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by-and-by a cloud takes all away.

Shakespeare.

MAURICE hurried on. He was annoyed by the delay which his meeting with Brogden had caused him, and fearful lest he should miss his appointment. Before he had walked twenty yards all his thoughts, all his mental powers were bent upon the one object of his journey, and the dangerous papers which he had just received were entirely forgotten. He had placed them in a pocket in the inside of the breast of his coat, and there they lay, for the time, as in oblivion.

He soon crossed the field and reached the bog. He found little difficulty in mak-

ing his way over it, as there was a beaten track. The moon was now up, shedding a soft light, though much darkened by the heavy clouds which floated around her white disc.

Away from the bog, and away round the foot of the hill upon which stood the mysterious Keep of Ballybar.

Over several small hills, and then down into a deep valley, and into the wild Glen of Ballybar.

A scene of stern beauty. The sides towered upwards precipitous, and in most parts quite perpendicular. In many places the sides were barren of vegetation; in others, fern and heath grew wildly luxuriant, and here and there were scattered small cramped trees and stunted dwarf birches. At the farther end of the glen, rising heavenward in rugged massiveness, were huge rocks, over which poured a large torrent of water with terrible velocity and a low, booming noise. The water fell into a deep rocky basin below, whence it gurgled

up and sped swiftly down the centre of the glen in a broad stream.

As it rushed over the highest rock, the cataract formed itself into an arch, falling three or four yards from the side. Twenty men might have stood behind it untouched. At the base and behind the water, the rocks had been by some strange power hollowed out, leaving a large dark cave. About twenty yards from the waterfall the rock formed an abrupt square, thus broadening the glen. Up the sides of this corner was placed a species of rough ladder which led to the hill above. By whom this was placed, for what purpose, or when, was a mystery.

Half-way up the ladder there was a small opening which conducted to a broad ledge. This ledge passed round the rock and under the cataract, ending at a large boulder, above which sprang out a solitary dwarf birch. Down the glen upon this side stood an old rude hut, and close to it a primitive wooden bridge crossed the stream.

The moon, stealing from behind some

dark cloud, cast a bright mellowed light into the glen, glittering upon the rushing stream, and making the shadowed nooks more dark and grim.

Upon the old bridge stood Maurice O'More waiting. Would she come—would she come? Had he not been tricked? No, no, the token was undoubted.

And the hours—the weary, weary hours—passed and still he was waiting.

The snow began to fall in slow, heavy flakes, and yet she came not.

There was a light footstep behind him. He could distinguish it despite the deafening roar of the cataract.

He turned quickly round. A wild cry rang upon the night.

“Ailleen!”

“Maurice!”

And the two souls remingled in one long, passionate kiss.

In that long, passionate embrace they hung upon each other with pulses throbbing and hearts beating wildly. It seemed

that the sweet content of their one soul was too much to bear—they felt a strange yearning to leap into the torrent and assure themselves that they would pass together down to that great bourne beyond the sleep called death, and rest united upon the unknown clouds of eternity.

They could not speak—they could not breathe; they could only cling and cling, as if in fear that the next moment would mar them again—part them for ever.

And as they stood in that long trance of delight a sombre cloud crossed the moon, and cast deep shadows upon their mingled unutterable gladness.

They had sounded the depths of misery and they had arisen from the darkness into light.

And still as they stood the mist deepened, and the black clouds floated more frequently across the moon. The wind swept along with a shrill cry; the cataract dashed down from its dizzy height, falling into the rocky basin beneath with a continued murmuring,

booming sound like the rumbling of distant thunder.

"I cannot speak yet," he murmured, still holding her tightly to his breast. "I feel as if words would choke me—as if my heart would burst with its own excess of bliss. This is exceeding joy. Surely it must be such love as this that forms the glory of heaven."

She did not speak; but her soft arms clung tighter round his neck. Her soft bosom rose and fell upon his.

"I cannot speak," Maurice again muttered; "and yet I feel as if I would fain run madly down the hills shouting my great joy to the wind. O, Aileen, Aileen, did you but know how I have yearned and yearned with burning heart and throbbing brain for this re-union. Did you but know how in my secret heart I have hoped and again despaired, until I have wished that heaven would be merciful and let me die. The world seemed all so blank—so blank; and life, which now I prize, so very weary

without you. We will live—live for each other; and all the dreary achings of the past shall but serve to sweeten the gladness of the future.”

“It shall—it shall.”

“No doubt, no fear, shall mar the heaven we shall make. Our lives shall mingle in our love, and walk as one down to the deep shadow of the grave.”

“With heaven’s good will it may be ever so.”

“It shall be so,” he cried, warmly. “We have passed through the furnace and been proved. Sorrow has fallen heavily upon us; but a brighter future is opening before us, and from this night forth shall be unchequered bliss. Heaven is too good, too kind to visit us with more affliction than we have already endured. Here ends our misery and here begins our joy.”

Ailleen was silent; her head sank upon his shoulder, hiding her face.

In the delirious ecstasy which had possessed him from the first moment of their

meeting, he had not observed Aileen's manner; he forgot everything but her presence.

After the first outburst of joy a change had slowly stolen over the beautiful girl; her face was pale, and she was strangely quiet. Ever and anon she turned her head and looked timidly behind her, as if fearful of seeing some one.

She did not meet the passionate warmth of her betrothed with all that wild expression of delight which her nature would have warranted him in expecting. At first she had been like him, all passion, all love. But slowly as she went on speaking she had seemed to grow cold and almost unloving.

Some inexplicable dread seemed to hang over her, increasing as Maurice continued to speak. But of all this Maurice was totally unconscious, and now his wonder was great as he felt her suddenly begin to tremble violently.

He glanced quickly up towards the

blackening sky, and for the first time perceived the falling snow and the rapidly gathering storm.

“Are you cold?” he asked, tenderly.

“No.”

“Why, then, do you tremble so?”

“I—I do not know; I feel faint. But do not mind, it will soon pass away.”

“It must be the cold. See, we will have a snow-storm to-night; the thick flakes are already falling. Come, we will go home.”

He made a movement as if to go; but she did not stir.

“Home,” she murmured in a strange choking voice.

Maurice was for a moment troubled by the tone, but he was too anxious for her comfort to heed it much.

“Ay, home,” he said, cheerily. “Home to my father’s house, where you will soon be mistress. Oh, believe me, Aileen, there will be glad hearts in the steading of Myles O’More this night. Come.”

Again he made a movement to advance, and she hung her head hesitatingly.

"Are you tired?" he said, softly. "We have only to go as far as Rathlin, and there we will get my horse. Come, darling, shall I carry you?"

He placed his arm round her waist as if to lift her up.

"No," she said in a low voice.

"Then you can lean upon me—lean all your weight. Oh, my own—own, I would fain press you into my very heart, and never let you out again. There, do not withdraw your arm; keep it so, close round my neck, that I may be quite, quite sure of your dear presence. Come, let us go."

In his happiness he was blind.

She made no motion; she still hung her head, still seemed to hesitate. But he could not fail to observe her hesitation now.

An incomprehensible pang shot swiftly through his breast as he gazed upon her open-eyed amazement.

Sudden fear darkened upon his soul—a sudden dread of some evil approaching.

“What is the matter?” he asked, with a nervous tremor in his voice.

Slowly Maurice withdrew his arm from her waist. He gazed upon her downcast head, his lip quivering, and his blood began to chill around the heart.

“Ailleen,” he cried in sudden anguish; “what is the meaning of all this?”

His hands still touched her, and he felt that she was trembling violently.

But yet she spoke not, stirred not.

His hands dropped to his sides and his body bent, and he seemed like one utterly cast down.

“Holy Mother, what is this?” he groaned. “Ailleen, Ailleen, in the saints’ name, speak to me—speak to me one word, only one word—and save me from distraction.”

She trembled still more violently. She seemed about to fall, and she clutched at the wooden rail of the bridge for support. But still she did not speak.

He clasped his hands appealingly.

"Aileen," he cried, in smothered accents, "speak, for sweet mercy's sake. Will you not come with me—will you not come home?"

He waited for the response, lingering upon her breath as upon the knell of doom.

The cataract roared louder, louder as it dashed madly over the precipice; the wind shrieked as it swirled along, and the snow fell faster and thicker.

Very low, very hushed, but audible above all to his eager ear, came the answer—came, quenching the lamp of hope, and turning the warm heart's blood into ice.

"I cannot go with you."

"Cannot?"

He started with a loud cry of anguish; and Aileen clutched the wooden rail of the bridge tighter.

CHAPTER XIII.

FALSE ?

What care I how fair she be,
If she be not fair to me ?

MAURICE pressed his hands upon his head. The place seemed to be swimming around him ; he felt as if some invisible hand caught him up and was whirling him towards a dark abyss—nearer, nearer, nearer to the black chasm. He threw out his hands wildly, clutching at air.

The knell had sounded—he was doomed to despair.

All the words of Brogden, all the dark suggestions of his words, flashed like a burning fire of torture upon him.

She was false—she was false.

O misery, misery, all the misfortunes of

the past were as nothing in the balance with this.

A low, pleading voice broke upon his ear, like the soft wail of a drowning infant.

"Maurice, Maurice, for our Virgin Mother's sake be calm—for my sake, for Ailleen's sake, be calm and listen."

He turned his eyes towards her.

She stood, oh so beautiful, so beautiful—more lovely now even in his despair. She stood with one foot advanced, her body bent forward, and her hands stretched out towards him, imploringly.

He could not speak—his utterance was choked. A demon was plucking at his heart, and he could have hated her for the very beauty which enchanted him.

Again that low, pleading voice broke upon the night, stealing upon his ear, despite the loud roaring of the torrent, and the fierce wrath which was rising within him.

"Do not be rash, Maurice—do not judge

me harshly. You do not, cannot yet know the motive of my present conduct; but wait until the time comes when you may know all. And Maurice, Maurice, my own dear heart—believe that in all I do I still and must ever love you.”

“Love me,” he cried, fiercely. “Do not profane—do not mock me. You have this night cast me off—you have taken refuge with the foul murderer of your parents—you have chosen between us—and may the holy powers of heaven pardon you.”

His words ended in a low moan.

“You mistake—you mistake,” she cried, wildly. “Maurice, Maurice, have faith and trust me. I am your own, own still. My heart can never change. It must still cling to you—living upon your love or dying in its loss.”

She covered her face with her hands and sobbed bitterly.

A strange calm fell upon Maurice—a calm like that soft lull in nature which precedes a great tempest.

He approached her and caught her by the wrist.

"Answer me," he said, in a suppressed voice—"answer me truly, as you would answer the great Judge of all our actions. You are living with—with Cormac?"

"Yes."

"You left your home with him?"

"No, no, no, as I hope for mercy."

"It matters not; you are with him now. One more question, Aileen, and I have done."

His voice quivered and his hand shook.

Aileen still sobbed.

"One more question, Aileen," he went on, evidently making a great effort to control himself. "Will you leave him and return to those friends which that villain has left you? Will you come now with me?"

He waited for a reply. She sobbed and did not speak.

"You do not answer," he said, hoarsely.

She clasped her hands, holding them upwards as if appealing to heaven.

She raised her voice in piercing, prayerful accents.

“ Oh, sacred, all-seeing Power of Heaven, reach down from Your height, and in Your sweet mercy touch this rash man’s heart, for You, knowing all things, know that I am true.”

She ended with a deep sob, and the wind wailed as if in sympathy.

The moon stole softly from behind a dark cloud, casting a mellowed light upon the lovely girl, as she stood now with her arms crossed upon her heaving bosom, her sweet pale face raised devoutly heaven-ward, and her red mantle floating to the wind.

Maurice still kept his hand upon her wrist as he gazed upon her with a pained, bewildered countenance.

“ You are true ? ” he said, slowly.

“ As heaven.”

“ Then you will go with me ? ”

She swayed her body, moaning. Maurice continued, suppressing his passion.

“ If you love me—if you are not false—

if you are not the foul thing which it would affright the world to name—you will go with me, you will seek the shelter of the hearts that yearn for you—you will go home.”

“ I cannot.”

“How—how?” he cried. “What stands between us? It is yours to choose, home, or love, or——Let me not think of the alternative—it is too horrible. But you will come—you will come?”

“Not now—not now.”

“And you will return to—*him*?”

“I must—I must. Oh, Virgin Mother, help me, for this is very hard.”

Maurice dropped her hand with a low groan. She was guilty—guilty.

He spoke in a hoarse, hopeless tone.

“May those sacred powers which you have invoked be merciful. Aileen O’Sullivan, may heaven forgive you, for I cannot.”

He turned as if to go, but he seemed so weak that he was compelled to pause,

leaning against the rail of the bridge for support.

"Maurice, Maurice," she cried, in agony, advancing towards him.

He turned his pale face from her.

"No more—no more," he said, in hollow tones. "Leave me now. We have spoken our last to each other. Now we part never more to meet; never more to hope."

She wrung her hands.

"Not so—not so. We shall yet again meet—we shall yet live but for each other."

"That can never be now."

"It shall—it shall. You will yet learn to forgive me."

"I will try."

"And to love me?"

"Never more."

She threw her arms around him.

"Maurice, Maurice, do not kill me."

"Are you worthy to live?" he cried, wildly. "Ailleen O'Sullivan, better than

this I could have borne to see you, cold and white, shrouded in your coffin. Then I could have knelt down upon your grave and prayed for your eternal bliss ; but now—now what can I do?—what can I do but hope that the holy saints may forgive you for the bitter misery which you have wrought this night ? ”

“Cruel, cruel, cruel,” sobbed the pale-faced girl, still clinging to him.

He endeavoured to disengage himself from her hold.

“Let our love and hate end here. Farewell, Aileen. Hard as it is, for the sake of my dead love I will try to forgive you. Farewell. Nay, don't stop me, for you only heap torture upon my wounds.”

Still she clung to him.

“No, no, no. Do not—do not leave me yet, Maurice, my own—for you are still yet my own. Do not—do not leave me. You have much to learn.”

“Away, away. Your arms entwine

around me like the slimy serpent coils that bring death."

"You cannot—you shall not leave me."

"Away, away," he cried, fiercely. "Let us part now, lest in my agony I curse you."

"Hear me first; I will tell you all now—I will——"

"Enough, enough. Evermore there is a gulf between us, which no words, no justification, can ever bridge. Love is dead, and hope is dead, and my hard task must be to forget. Away."

"Do not leave me in despair."

"I leave you to that fate which you have chosen. Farewell."

"Not thus, not now, we part."

"Ay, thus—and now, and for ever."

With one fierce wrench, he tore the once-loved arms from his neck, and cast her from him.

She fell to the ground, moaning in bitterness of heart.

Maurice sprang forward a pace; then,

turning, he looked back in anguish upon the fair creature who had once been to his life hope, love and joy, and was now its misery.

“Oh, Aileen, Aileen,” he cried, stretching out his hands towards her. “So fair—so fair, and yet so false. Oh, woman, formed in most angelic mould, you have fallen from your height by some fell fiend’s influence, and I can think that angels weep for your sad degradation.”

Aileen sprang wildly to her feet.

“This is too much—too much,” she cried.

“I can endure no more. Help.”

She clapped her hands thrice.

The door of the little hut, close by, was suddenly thrown open. There was a rush as of hurrying feet; and in a moment Maurice O’More found his arms pinioned in the grasp of two strong men.

He was dumb.

Surprise, horror, rage, deprived him of speech and of the power of motion. His eyes, burning with passion, were fixed upon

the lovely traitoress, who stood before him in that uncertain moonlight with soft, glistening eyes, more beautiful than ever.

There was a flash of triumph in her mien.

A moment they stood thus.

"Betrayed," at length shouted Maurice, hoarse with fierce passion—"betrayed, and by you."

"Not betrayed, but saved. Now, Maurice, farewell. We shall meet soon, and you will understand all that is now so dark."

She turned hurriedly away, and in the shadows of the glen her form was soon lost to her betrayed lover's sight.

"Go," he cried, fiercely; "and may each step you take be heavier clogged with the black mire of perdition, till you are dragged down to a misery deep as mine."


There was no response. She was gone and he was betrayed into the power of some unknown enemy.

CHAPTER XIV.

MAURICE'S IDOL SHATTERED.

But while he slowly wandered there,
Pouring his love-sighs on the air,
A villain trapped him unaware.

Arion.

 MAURICE turned upon the two men who silently held him.

"Release me," he said, wrathfully.

"Daren't," replied one of the men gruffly ; " you must come with us."

"Dead, I may ; alive, never."

He bounded forward, but the men held him firmly.

"Help, help," he shouted.

He seemed to be suddenly possessed of superhuman strength. He dragged his two assailants towards the edge of the stream. With an effort, they drew him back. For a moment he seemed to yield, and one of

the men took a rope from his pocket ; but, before he could make the slightest use of it, Maurice gave him a sudden twist, jerking him a few paces forward. Then he drew his arm quickly backwards, and dug his elbow into the stomach of the other man, who rolled on to the ground, tearing with him part of the breast of Maurice's coat.

Maurice was free. He made a start for the bridge, and at that moment was met by the man whom he had first knocked down. They closed.

The other man was again upon his feet, and came to the aid of his comrade. Again the odds were against him, and Maurice began to think that his strength was failing.

The snow was falling—the high wind shrieking—the cataract roaring—and the struggle continued.

“ Help, help.”

There was an answering friendly shout repeated nearer—nearer.

Help was at hand.

He felt his senses leaving him, and he felt conscious that the men were raising him in their arms and carrying him away. He could not cry out—he was too weak—and his last chance was gone.

Thud—thud—thud.

Fast and furious rained the blows of a heavy stick about the heads and shoulders of the two enemies.

They instantly dropped him to the ground, and turned upon their new opponent.

There was a loud clatter of cudgels mingled with fierce oaths, more shouting, the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps.

Clatter, clatter, clatter went the cudgels—hotter, fiercer, louder, more numerous the shouts—and three more men joined in the affray.

A short, fierce combat, and the two assailants of Maurice turned and fled over the bridge and into the darkness of the glen.

The brave fellow who had been the first to come to his rescue was the first to make a rush after them, and in so doing he stumbled headforemost over the prostrate body of Maurice.

In an instant the man was upon his hands and knees, peering into the pale face of him he had rescued from an unknown fate.

"Maurice, aroon," said the man, softly ; "is it alive or dead ye are?"

Maurice stirred, with a groan.

The man jumped up and looked round for his companions. He heard the noise of their feet upon the rickety little bridge.

"Here, Paudge, Mick, Phadhrick," shouted the man; "come back—come back, and may the devil blister the soles of them blackguards, so that they may stick in some bog until we can come up with them. Come back—here's Maurice nearly killed again."

In a few minutes the three men stood by his side.

"What's the matter now, Tony, my boy?" inquired Phadhrick, who was the first to approach.

"It's just what I thought it would be," said Tony, anxiously. "Here, boys, help me to lift him."

They raised Maurice to his feet.

The moon again shone out, throwing a dim light upon the group.

"He's all right," muttered Paudge, sententially.

"Can't you speak at all, at all, Maurice, agra?" inquired Tony.

Maurice stared blankly into the face of his warm-hearted foster-brother. By-and-by, the blank stare changed to an expression of recognition.

"Tony," he murmured, in a low voice.

"Yes, it's myself. Are ye hurt?"

"Deeply."

"Where?—where?"

"No matter; my wounds are beyond sight—beyond cure."

"Oh, murder. Bad luck follow the ugly villains that did it. May the——"

"Hush."

Maurice was leaning against a large piece of rock which had sometime fallen from above. He shuddered.

Tony released him.

"Come, boys," cried Tony, flourishing his cudgel; "by the Holy Church, we'll pay them out for this. Come along, boys."

"Stay," said Maurice; "where are you going?"

"After them villains."

"No; let them go."

"What, without beating them?"

"Yes, they are friends of——Never mind, let them go. Come, assist me—we will go home."

Outwardly, Maurice was unhurt; inwardly, he was sorely crushed. He seemed to have lost all physical strength, and he leant heavily upon the arms of Tony and Paudge as they moved down the glen,

Phadhrick and Michael followed close behind.

They moved on slowly. Presently Maurice turned his face upon his foster-brother.

"How was it that you arrived so opportunely?" he asked.

"Faith, it was just because I had the good luck to hear what that dirty spalpeen was saying to you this afternoon; and when I heard him tell ye to go alone, sure I knew it was only a trick of the black Boccagh to make away with ye. So I made up my mind that, whatever happened, I wouldn't be far away. That's how I came here with the boys, and found that I was right, and that you were wrong, and that sorry a sight of the poor Aileen you would ever get."

Maurice shuddered.

"Hush, hush!—do not breathe her name. Henceforth let it be buried in the tomb, where lie all my hopes."

Tony peered inquiringly into his face.

"Has anything happened? Ye don't mean that ye've seen——"

"Hush, hush, Tony!—you torture me. Be satisfied; you shall incur no more danger for my sake. Here, this night, end all my struggles, all my hopes. Holy Mother, help me, for my future is a sorry blank."

"Do—do ye mean that ye—ye won't go after the Boccagh again?"

"Yes, the chase is run out."

"Then, no matter what has happened, I'm glad to hear ye say that." And Tony's breast was relieved of its greatest load of sorrow.

Maurice lent heavier upon the arms of his friends, but they bore him up, cheerily. They were proud of having saved him from imminent danger, and they were sincerely glad that he had decided upon abandoning the fruitless search for Cormac.

Little dreamt they at what a cost, at what a sacrifice that decision had been taken. Little knew they of the utter wreck of his young life.

She, once so dear, was false—was worse than false. She was—he dared not think what. He tried to put the horrible thought from him ; but it rose up like a fiend, taunting his despair. The power of action seemed to have deserted him. He felt his limbs shake under him, and he felt that reason was tottering upon its throne. The bright guiding star of life had faded, and he was cast forth upon a troubled ocean, helmless, and unpiloted. What was there to do, but resign himself to the fitful waves, and be wafted whither they would—whither he cared not !

So they turned slowly out of the glen, bending their steps towards Rathlin ; and the wind swept along howling, whirling and twirling the large flakes of snow as they fell ; and the wild cataract roared and bellowed a thunderous chorus to the wind, and gurgled and bubbled up from its rocky basin, flowing faster, faster down the centre of the dark glen.

The black clouds flitted more constantly

before the white moon, hiding the light for long intervals. The stars shone dimly through the mist, and a deep shadow overhung the earth.

* * * * *

When the two men who had attacked Maurice O'More had been driven off by Tony and his companions, they had rushed over the bridge, and down the glen. At the foot of the glen they re-crossed the stream by leaping over it at its narrowest point. They then made across the fields, without pausing.

Both had been sorely belaboured, and they did not cease running until they reached the bog. Here they paused out of breath.

"Bad luck to him!" muttered one; "he may do what he likes for me, now; I won't bother myself about him."

"Whist, O'Cree," said the other, "the poor boy didn't know us."

"Know us or not, Terence, my boy, 'he

has made my bones ache ; and I won't risk them for him again."

"Ye'll just have to do as ye're told."

"And what's that?"

"I don't know. But I know that, anyhow, we'll have to go and tell Cormac what has happened."

"Come on, then."

The two men having recovered breath, hurried on across the bog, then over the fields till they reached the highway. They turned towards Rathlin, moving rapidly, and constantly looking about as if expecting to meet some one.

Within half a mile of the village they halted.

"This is the spot, O'Cree, isn't it?" said Terence, interrogatively.

O'Cree was examining an old thorn tree which grew by the wayside.

"Yes," he answered ; "this is the place, for here's the mark on the tree."

"I can't see it."

"There then, ye can feel it."

Terence laid his hand upon the tree, and felt a deep indenture in the form of a cross.

"That's it," he said.

O'Cree, putting his hand to his mouth, gave vent to a sharp sound, like the barking of a dog.

The signal was answered, and in a few moments Cormac and Shawn came up together.

"Well, well," said the former eagerly, "have you got him safe?"

"No," answered O'Cree, uneasily. "Sorry a bit of him could we get."

"How. Did he not come?"

"Oh, yes—he came."

"I'm certain of that," Shawn broke in; "for when I gave him the message, his eyes said, as plain as ever words could, that he would go, though he were to meet the Old Boy himself."

Cormac spoke in low, angry tones.

"How is it, then, that you have not got him?"

"Because we couldn't," returned O'Cree, and explained what had occurred.

"Hum! He has been followed by some of his friends, and they have arrived in time to save him for the gallows. Shawn, you should have been there! you might have prevented this."

"What can we do now, then?" asked Shawn.

Cormac appeared to reflect. He was evidently much troubled by the information which he had received from his emissaries. Presently he spoke in an abrupt, hurried manner.

"This is our only plan. You, Terence and O'Cree, go to the village, and keep watch there. Do nothing, but observe all. You, Shawn, hasten up to the keep, find Phelim Conolly, and bring him along with some of the boys, towards the glen. I will go thither now, and draw O'More and his companions after me. You come by the rocks, and I will meet you. It will be an easy matter then to secure them. Now

away. Maurice O'More must not return to Rathlin."

"If the boys will come," said Shawn, "we will be down upon ye in no time."

"Conolly will manage that."

Shawn, with his long rapid stride, made off in the direction of Ballybar. Terence and O'Cree marched off towards Rathlin.

Cormac watched them for a few minutes, as if hesitating whether or not to call them and give them some other instructions. But he turned, and leaped across the dry ditch which was by the side of the way without speaking. When he was on the other side of the ditch he hurried along towards the bog.

"Now for my part," he muttered; "and may the saints grant that it may be successful."

His speed increased as he approached the bog, and when he reached it he cut directly across, without taking the ordinary foot-path.

He hurried on over the soft ground—on, without knowing that his haste was destroying its own object ; for whilst he took that way, saving a distance of half a mile, Maurice O'More and his companions crossed the bog by the usual path.

Thus, unobserved and unobserving, he passed those whom he sought, and rapidly moved towards the glen.

The mysterious Boccagh appeared to be quite unhurt, notwithstanding that only a few hours previously he had been pitched over a precipice into Lough Bragh. There was a red mark upon his cheek, but that was the only evidence of his terrible struggle.

The explanation of this mystery was simple. He had not been thrown over the precipice at all.

When Brogden had raised him up, he had, instead of throwing him over, just lifted him on to the top of the rock. The marvellous power and agility of the Boccagh saved him. He fastened upon the

rock, and with his foot kicked over a loose stone, which rumbled down into the Lough, conveying the impression to the assailant that it was Cormac.

CHAPTER XV.

IN DESPERATION.

I guess 'twas frightful there to see
A lady so very fair as she—
Beautiful exceedingly.

Coleridge.

WHATEVER its purport might have been, Aileen witnessed the failure of her strange project, and when her lover had been drawn away by his friends, she staggered down to the old hut, down to the large piece of rock against which Maurice had been but now leaning.

She strained her eyes out into the darkness, as if seeking him whom she had betrayed.

A low, piercing wail rose upon the wind.
“Lost, lost, lost.”

Then she slowly sank to the earth; her head reclined wearily against the rock;

and the wind swept and swirled the white snow above her and around her; and she moaned piteously.

“Is there no help—no help? Is there no hand to stretch forth and save me? He is gone. Oh, my heart, my heart, would that I might die now, for I am weary of life. He is gone, gone, gone—to meet destruction. He is rushing into the very arms of death, and I am powerless to aid him. Oh, misery, misery.”

And still she moaned, and the cataract roared and bellowed mockingly. Presently she started.

“Cormac—where is he? Why is he not here? He cannot mean to desert me in this extremity? No, no, he is true—ever true—and I must seek him.”

She rose hurriedly to her feet. She drew the folds of her mantle closely around her, for she began to feel the keenness of the air.

She bent her steps hastily towards the bridge. She laid her hand upon the rail,

and prepared to cross. She hastened; she reached the centre, and was stopped.

She had come into collision with a man who had been crossing from the other side.

She drew back hastily, and a strange chill passed over her fair frame.

The man appeared to stand quite still.

"Cormac," she murmured, faintly.

At that moment the moon threw a hazy light upon the glen.

Aileen started with a stifled scream, for she had recognised the man.

Brogden!

"By all the powers of heaven—Aileen herself," shouted he, exultantly.

She was, for the moment, stunned; she stood powerless to move to the right or to the left.

Before she could recall her scattered senses, before she could breathe, before she could stir, Brogden sprang fiercely upon her, gripping her savagely by the wrist.

She screamed aloud, wildly, piercingly. The wind took up the sound and carried it

along ; the cataract splashed and gurgled tauntingly.

Brogden pressed his hand roughly upon her mouth. His hand trembled, his body shook, but it was with the excess of suppressed passion.

His voice was low and hoarse.

"Be silent," he muttered. "You have nothing to fear from any one save yourself."

"Do not touch me then—do not touch me ; for your touch is that of a fiend, and burns blackly into my soul."

She struggled to release herself, but he only held her the more tight.

"Don't be a fool," he muttered, hotly in her ear. "Your struggles are as vain as would be your cries for help."

"I have friends near."

"Bah ! listen to the wind ; its softest breath would drown your shrillest cry. Hear the roaring of the waters ; had you twenty voices mingled in one they would not be heard. Therefore, be wise, and calm yourself."

"Take your hands from me, lest you have deep cause to regret this villany."

"Are you mad? Think you that I have striven so long, sought so hard against many disappointments, sought with the whole ardour of my being for this meeting, to lose you now?"

"Oh, coward!"

"There, you may take what liberties you please now. My lucky star is in the ascendant, and has guided me hither. Think what you will and say it if you are so minded; for now we have again met, Ailleen O'Sullivan, we part not in life."

Her struggles were in vain—she was already exhausted. And now she trembled with a vague fear.

What fearful meaning was in his words—what terrible threat in the eyes which shone down upon her with a brutal light.

He clasped her wrists as if with gyves. She could not move.

"What, would you?" she moaned, in pain.

"Nothing but your welfare, Aillean," he said, in accents less harsh. "I seek but your happiness, and to satisfy your every wish I will devote my life. You know not what torture I have endured for you. You cannot know or you would pity me."

She swayed her body to and fro.

"Pity him—pity him," she moaned.

"Ay, pity me. I have risked life, honour, everything for you. Surely such devotion is at least worthy of some little sympathy? Aillean, I love you?"

"Holy saints, help me."

"Calm yourself—be sensible—and you have nothing to fear. Listen. We will leave this land, and seek a new country and a new home. There we shall forget the past and you will yet be happy as my wife."

"Your wife!" she cried, in frenzied accents. "Your wife!"

"Mine."

"*Your* wife—MURDERER!"

Brogden recoiled—his grasp relaxed. That strangled agitation which, upon several

previous occasions, had overcome him, again seized him, and he quivered.

He spoke as if something were stifling him.

“What do you mean?”

Ailleen, feeling his grasp loosen, and that he trembled, gained somewhat of strength, in the hope which now possessed her that she might awe this dark spirit into submission.

“I mean,” she said, firmly, “that were all things else aside—were it even possible that I might love you—no power, no force would make me sink my soul into the black perdition which would be mine in marrying the assassin of my parents.”

“It is false—false—I swear it! I am belied—traded!”

“Oh, man, man, save your false oaths. You have brought misery and desolation to our hearth; you have cast me down to the depths of despair; but your death cannot recall the past. Do not, then, reject the hope of mercy in the future. Fly, fly, whilst there is yet time, and seek

some unknown land where you may repent."

Brogden laughed coarsely. But still agitation underlayed his rude mirth. The laugh was forced and hollow.

He drew close to her. She crouched from him; but again he held her. She could feel his hot, burning breath upon her cheek as it hissed out from between his clenched teeth. Through the dim light she could discern his dark features; and in their black malignity she saw that the demon was unquelled—that passion still burned fiercely within—and she shuddered with vague inexplicable horror.

He spoke slowly, distinctly; and there was a strange horror in his voice as it broke upon her ear above the roaring of the cataract and the shrill shrieking of the wind.

And the white snow fell faster—faster.

"You have charged me with a heavy crime," he said. "Now suppose that it were true—suppose that I am guilty—have

you no dread that the man who was so deeply steeped in guilt—You shudder. Then you can think it possible that the man who had run the risk of one crime might hazard another.”

There was a fearful significance in his words, and the blood stopped icily in her veins—her heart ceased to beat—she was paralysed.

“You—you—will—not—*kill me?*” she murmured, in broken tones.

“You have an alternative,” he said in guttural accents. “Now, more than ever, it is necessary that you should be mine. Therefore, choose, be my wife or——”

“Your wife,” she cried, wildly. “Never—never ! Sooner than that, welcome death a thousand times.”

“Then, by all that’s foul or good, Ailleen O’Sullivan, you have looked your last upon the light of this world.”

“No, no. Mercy, mercy.”

“You have your choice.”

“Mercy—mer——”

"Choose. My wife, or——"

"Death! Death! Death!" she shrieked.

"A thousand fiends, then, but it shall be so," he shouted, fiercely.

She screamed fearfully, and the wind bore the scream mockingly along.

He put his hand into his pocket, as if seeking something, thus releasing one of her arms. With the courage and swiftness where-with the danger inspired her, she dashed the disengaged hand into the man's face. The suddenness of the unexpected blow for the moment staggered him, and she was at liberty.

With a quick spasmodic motion she sprang away from him, and fled precipitately.

Brogden instantly recovered from the surprise caused by these movements, and with a fierce oath he pursued.

She saw the little hut, and she bounded into it. He was close behind, and saw the refuge which she had taken. He dashed madly through the open doorway into the farthest end of the hut.

There was a rush—a rustle of a dress.

He turned round and saw Aileen, who had been behind the door, pass out.

With a loud cry, he made a rush after her—his foot caught in something, he stumbled, and fell to the ground, cursing. His hand touched the cause of his fall.

It was an old pick. He threw it from him, sprang to his feet, and out into the night. •

He paused, peering in baffled rage around. The moon was hid, and the glen was quite dark. The wind swept and swirled the falling snow into his face, blinding him.

Again the moon shone out, casting light upon the rocky back of the glen.

Brogden gave a fierce shout of exultation.

There upon the ledge, which passed behind the waterfall, he caught the glimmer of Aileen's red mantle.

On issuing from the hut she had rushed wildly down to the bridge, across the stream, and climbed up the strange

ladder which led the side of the rocks, to the hills above. Half-way up, she had come to the small aperture leading to the narrow ledge.

Fearing that her pursuer might overtake her before she had reached the top, and hoping that he might pass without observing her hiding place, she crept through the aperture on to the narrow ledge of rock.

There she now stood in trembling fear; and the wind swept the snow about her, and the roaring cataract dashed madly over her, out beyond her, with its loud, booming thunder.

She stood on the slippery, slimy ledge of rock, in a quivering, icy fear; and the cold white hand of Death seemed stretching out to clutch her.

The waters bubbled and roared with a terrible crashing thunder—roared, bubbled, and leapt above her, beside her, and under.

Far, stretching up to the height, was the

smooth, slimy wall of the rock. She cast hurriedly down her eyes, and saw, with a dreadful shock, the gulf yawning under her feet, and the white foam of the waters boiling and leaping towards her.

Her head grew giddy and dazed, and everything swam before her.

Down beneath, the white foam seemed like a thousand white demons, laughing and yelling in mad delight, and mocking at her despair—stretching out long white hands, and holding them upward, inviting the horror-struck girl to leap from the giddy height into their white embrace.

Oh, it was horrible, horrible, horrible!

And an evil spirit within her prompted the helpless girl to obey the call of the demons beneath, and leap down to their protection—ending for ever and ever the deep misery of her existence. Only one little step, the most delicate inclination of her shuddering body forward, and all would be over for ever.

Only a quick, cold thrill as she sank

down into the abyss, a splash, and then in her ears a rushing, and crushing, and laughing of the waters, as the white foam below swallowed her up, and she sank into the arms of Death.

Then—calm, and peace, and quietude, for ever, evermore.

Yet life was dear ; and despite of all her misery, she clung to it tenaciously. She turned her eyes away from the gulf, and, shuddering, leant her forehead against the cold, slimy rock. She was sick—sick with fear, and had power neither to move backward nor forward.

A fiendish exultation arose within the breast of Brogden when he first discovered Aillean in her perilous position upon the rock. He stood with a malicious fire flashing from his eyes, as he saw her moving along the slimy ledge.

He waited with a demoniac hope of seeing her the next moment slip and roll headlong down the precipice into the foaming waters.

He waited—waited; and the moon shone out brighter than it had yet shone that night, and the falling snow began to cease.

He waited—waited; and as he saw her slowly crawl along that ledge upon which the footing was so treacherous, the demoniac hope gathered strength.

But still she did not slip—she did not fall.

He wished in his soul that she would tumble over, for it would spare him the necessity of pushing her over.

At length he saw her stand still.

He waited yet. She was only resting; she would move again, and she must fall. It was impossible for her to pass round the whole length of the rock without slipping. It was impossible for her to pass near the cataract, where the ledge would be too slimy for a cat to cross in safety. She must tumble. He was confident, and he was glad.

But she was still standing, apparently without intention of moving forward. By

the powers! she had moved a step backward. Then again she stopped.

She must be giddy. He fancied he could see her body swaying to and fro.

There!—She was falling!—No, by the saints! she had turned round upon the ledge, narrow as it was, and again faced towards the aperture by which she had got on to the rock.

With a gruff oath, Brogden dashed over to the bridge, crossed the stream, and began to ascend the cross-sticks which were placed against the rock, and served as a ladder to the hills above. He reached the aperture. He put his head through, and at that moment Aileen saw him.

She started with a scream—she stumbled; the scream rose louder and shriller upon the blast. She had slipped. Heavenly powers, she fell!

Brogden shouted.

But she was not over. She was down upon her hands and knees, trembling, and moaning piteously, but still safe.

Brogden drew breath. Much as he desired her life, that moment, when he thought she was rolling over the rocks down the black depths, a strange thrill had passed through his breast—a thrill of fear, almost of pity, for the beautiful and most unfortunate Ailleen. He stood with what to him was an incomprehensible awe, fixedly watching the crouching form of the ill-starred girl. He did not move; he held his breath and waited for her next motion.

Slowly—very slowly, and with the skill which belongs only to those whose lives depend upon the slightest movement to the right or to the left—upon the smallest balance to the one side or the other—Ailleen raised herself up—up to her feet.

But she trembled visibly, and the moon shining upon her pale face gave it a ghastly whiteness sickening for mortal eyes to look upon.

Brogden still gazed fixedly at her without moving. His wrath and all his evil passions returned as he observed the trembling

slowly subside, and met her eyes flashing upon him.

And yet there was nothing in those eyes to rouse up an angry spirit. They were full of a soft, tender pleading that would have struck upon the soul of one possessed of the smallest grain of pity, like a low, beseeching wail for mercy. Those eyes spoke most eloquently, and were full of a sweet imploring that seemed to rise like a wild, helpless cry above the roaring and splashing of the cataract.

But they did not touch the heart of the man who now read their language. They did not make him falter—they stirred up no gentle pity within his heart; their cry for mercy touched no answering chord within his breast—called forth not one single twinge of sympathy.

The sweet imploring of those eyes were thrown coldly back by the shining rock, and were answered in that man's breast only by passionate wrath.

Brogden's eyes gleamed with the fiendish

rage which burned within him. He waited until she would again move, still hoping for that terrible catastrophe which his sudden appearance to her almost occasioned.

And the moon shone down upon the helpless girl in her great peril, and lit up the dark features of her relentless enemy.

And the wind blew with a shrill cadence, and mingled with the booming thunders of the waters, like the cry of some sweet spirit wailing in anguished pity for the luckless girl.

And the snow fell slower, slower.

A dark thought flashed upon the mind of Brogden.

He would call to her—she might start and topple over.

“Ailleen!”

But still she moved not, answered not, It seemed as if she had not heard him. The bright, soft eyes were fixed upon him, with that despairing, pleading expression, and they wavered not.

He tried again—and the fiendish intent

spoke out in the sharp heartlessness of his voice.

“Ailleen!”

Why did she stand so still? Why did she stare so steadily at him? An icy thrill of fear ran along his veins. Could she be dead?

Could fright have snapped the silken thread of life? and was it possible that she was standing there, so white, so marble-like, a statue of death?

Had the dark shadow come unobserved, and kissed her upon the brow, stilling for ever the throbbing of that tender heart?

As these thoughts passed through his mind, Brogden remained transfixed, glaring at her as if fascinated by some mysterious power of witchery. He could not withdraw his eyes from that cold, motionless form; he felt as if the sight was freezing his heart's blood, and yet he remained with his fierce eyes fixed immovably upon her.

And as the white moon shone down upon these two figures in this strange position, they

looked more like two frozen statues, than a living, breathing man and woman.

She stood so still, so death-like. But her heart was yet beating with a tumult of fear and horror. She felt her brain and blood benumbed, so that she had no power to move or speak. It was as if she were frozen to the rock, and was to linger there and die. She heard her dreadful foe calling upon her name. She would have started, screamed; but happily for her she was at that moment incapable of stirring, and her tongue clove to her mouth.

The roaring of the waters became deadened in her ears, and she felt as if she were becoming insensible. Insensible in that terrible position—it would be death.

